

CLAWING RHETORIC BACK: HUMOR AND POLEMIC IN TZETZES' HEXAMETERS ON THE *HISTORIAI*

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Ἐπεὶ διηρθρώθησαν ὑμῖν ἃ λέγω,
νῦν τῆς ἀγωγῆς ὡς χρεὼν καταρκτέον.

After what I said was well-articulated for you,
one must now begin from education as appropriate.¹

These two lines come from the first poem of the so-called *Iambi* edited by Leone² and transmitted at the end of the *recensio altera* of John Tzetzes' *Historiai*, the long commentary in political verse on his own letter collection.³ As shown by Leone in the *prolegomena* to his edition, Tzetzes' *Historiai* went through different fluid publication phases: while the very first redaction was likely never properly circulated, two further redactions are known, *recensio prima* or A and *recensio altera* or B, respectively.⁴ They differ from each other mainly in the organization

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- 1 I. TZETZES, *Iambi*, vv. 49-50, in: P.A.M. LEONE, Ioannis Tzetzae *Iambi*. RSBN n.s. 6-7 (1969-1970) 127-156: 135.
- 2 LEONE, *Iambi* (cited n. 1). For an analysis of the manuscript tradition, see specifically *ibidem*, 127-132.
- 3 On the structure of the *Historiai*, see A. PIZZONE, The *Historiai* of John Tzetzes: A Byzantine ‘Book of Memory’? *BMGS* 41.2 (2017) 182-207.
- 4 See P.A.M. LEONE, Ioannis Tzetzae *Historiae* (2nd edition). Galatina 2007, vii-xxxix. A process of publication marked by multiple and progressive stages resulting into textual stratification seems to be more the rule than the exception for Tzetzes' works. As cases in point we can mention here his commentaries on Aristophanes (see W.J.W. KOSTER [ed.], Jo. Tzetzae *Commentarii in Aristophanem*, III. *Commentarium in Ranas et in Aves Argumentum Equitum*. Groningen 1960, xxv-xxxix) and the multiple layers of the manuscript from the Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, *Vossianus graecus* Q1 (see A. PIZZONE, Self-authorization and Strategies of Autography in John Tzetzes: The *Logismoi* Rediscovered. *GRBS* 60 [2020] 652-690).

of the textual material: in the former, letters are intertwined with commentary, whereas in the latter the commentary is separated from the bulk of letters creating an independent book. As said, *recensio altera* includes at its end three poems that are part of the paratextual material attached to the *Historiai*.⁵ Of these three poems, the first and the third are written in iambs while the second is in hexameters. Despite the clear variation in meter, Leone's edition carries the all-encompassing title of "Ioannis Tzetzae Iambi", overlooking the difference in form between the poems.⁶ The title adopted by Leone has partially prevented a correct assessment of this small corpus of texts.

The so-called *Iambi* are generally considered an attack against contemporary education prompted by the quarrel with the city *eparchos* Andronikos Kamateros,⁷ which also marks the second part of the *Historiai* as well as the *Logismoi*. As is often the case with Tzetzes' oeuvre, the poems are further annotated and glossed on with scholia.⁸ These scholia allow us to get a glimpse into how Tzetzes wanted his works to be engaged with and read.

In reading the paratexts following the rules of Hermogenian rhetoric, Tzetzes' glosses alert the reader that the small corpus is informed by βαρύτης, that is sarcasm-irony against his opponents.⁹ When it comes to the two lines we have chosen to open this article, the glosses further confirm that these poems need to be situated within Tzetzes' arguments certain groups of power:

5 See LEONE, Iambi (cited n. 1), 127-133. The three poems are introduced by a foreword in iambs (see *ibidem*, 134).

6 Leone, however, points out the metrical variation in the first footnote added to the paper: "Animadvertendum est carmina tria esse, quorum primum ac tertium versibus iambicis, secundum autem hexametris confectum est". See LEONE, Iambi (cited n. 1), 127 n. 1.

7 On the figure of Andronikos Kamateros, see A. BUCOSI (ed.), *Andronici Camateri Sacrum armamentarium. Pars prima* (CCSG, 75). Turnhout 2014, XIX-XXIV. On the episode, see P.A. AGAPITOS, John Tzetzes and the Blemish Examiners: A Byzantine Teacher on Schedography, Everyday Language and Writerly Disposition. *Medioevo Greco* 17 (2017) 1-57 and now more in detail A. PIZZONE, Tzetzes and the *Prokatasstasis*: A Story of People, Manuscripts and Performances, in: E. PRODI (ed.), *Τζετζικάι ἔπνευται*. Bologna 2021 (in press).

8 See above n. 4.

9 For βαρύτης see scholia ad v. 22 and 23 (cited n. 1), 143. The treatment of βαρύτης is to be found in Hermogenes, *On the types of Style* II 8 (HERMOGÈNE, *Les catégories stylistiques du discours* [De ideis]. *Synopses des exposés sur les Ideai*. Textes établis et traduits par M. PATILLON. Paris 2012), 182-187. Another device pinpointed by Tzetzes in the same scholion is the ὑποφορά or the preliminary introduction of the opponent's view to dismantle it with more ease in the main body of the speech: *On the invention* III 3, 9 (Ps.-HERMOGÈNE, *L'invention*. Anonyme, *Synopsis des exordes*. Textes établis et traduits par M. PATILLON. Paris 2012), 44.

Ἐπεὶ διηρθρώθησαν: προκατάστασις.¹⁰

Tzetzes limits himself to one word, drawn from Hermogenian rhetoric: *prokatas-tasis*, namely "anticipation, pre-exposition".¹¹ The term is far from neutral. The definition of προκατάστασις lies at the core of the polemic against Andronikos Kamateros¹² since Tzetzes challenges the definition and the very use of this rhetorical device as described by Hermogenes and practiced by his competitors.¹³ The gloss puts the metrical paratexts in direct dialogue with the broader polemic driving the second part of the *Historiai*. What is more, it offers a perfect instance of the way Tzetzes conceived of and employed scholia. We deal here with scholia to three poems, which in turn are part of the paratextual material attached to the book of *Historiai*. It is a multilayered structure where each layer is deeply connected to the others and contributes to the texts' overall meaning with the purpose of displaying Tzetzes' own rhetorical prowess. Tzetzes' use of scholia is indicative of the way he builds his own exegetical practice. Therefore, not only do the three poems contribute to creating the meaning of the book to which they are appended; the way they are dealt with and commented upon is also a key component, integral to that book.

Some sarcasm might be implied also by this short gloss. The nicely woven *prokatas-tasis* or pre-narration does not refer here to the antecedents, as theorized by Tzetzes' competitors, but to the preliminary rhetorical treatment or presentation of the main issues at stake. The same device is also highlighted in the scholion on v. 23 of the second poem.¹⁴

Just as a single gloss can lend itself to multiple interpretations, the *Iambi* include many layers of signification. As it often happens when dealing with literature, texts convey much more meaning than one might grasp at first glance. Literary products are often prompted by historical circumstances. Literature and reality engage in a twofold relation and in a constructive dialogue: literature is a reflection both *on* and *of* reality. And this is even truer when one deals with occasional texts.¹⁵ Our scholarly approach cannot be limited to formal aspects

10 Tz., *Iambi*, v. 10 (cited n. 1), 147.

11 On the complexity of this device, see A. SANCHO-ROYO, El término προκατάστασις en la teoría retórica griega sobre las partes del discurso retórico. *Habis* 37 (2006) 365-385.

12 See PIZZONE, Tzetzes and the *Prokatas-tasis* (cited n. 7).

13 The centrality of rhetoric in the polemic is patent also from Tz., *Hist.* XI 369 (cited n. 4), 102-358: this *historia*, in fact, represents both a summary of the rhetorical corpus of Hermogenes and the section where the polemic against Kamateros surfaces more clearly. See extensively PIZZONE, Tzetzes and the *Prokatas-tasis* (cited n. 7).

14 Tz., *Iambi* (cited n. 1), 147.

15 These points have been widely discussed in Byzantine studies during the last decades. See at least M. MULLETT, *Theophylact of Ochrid: Reading the Letters of a Byzantine*

alone but must look at how textual rhetoric is filtered and shaped through and by context, being it social, political and/or cultural. Literary texts accordingly can provide evidence of modes and practices in which they are immersed and from which they ultimately spring.

This conviction drives and inspires the present paper. Within the small corpus of the so-called *Iambs* mentioned above, we turn the spotlight on the only text that does not fit into the formal definition of 'iambs', that is Tzetzes' hexameters on the *Historiai*. Despite the scarce attention received by this text, we will show that this short poem offers striking insights both into the background of Tzetzes' polemic against contemporary education and more broadly into the intellectual scene of 12th-century Constantinople. Lastly, but not least importantly, it offers a key to read through the generic and rhetorical conventions of the *Historiai*, to "crack" their code. All these motives can be properly untangled only by reading the poem against both the context in which it was composed and Tzetzes' own idiosyncratic expressive modules, which often he himself unpacks for us. In what follows, we will first provide a translation of the text and second, we will dissect the text into conceptual blocks. This process of dissection, we believe, makes visible all the different and often overlapping layers of meaning as well as their implications and their interactions within and outside the text.

Tzetzes' Book of Rhetoric

Τζέτζου ρητορίας¹⁶ ἀδαήμονος ἦδε γε βίβλος,
ὡς φάσαν οἵπερ ἔφαντο· ἀληθέα ταῦτα δὲ εἶπον.
Οὐκ ἴδον, οὐ δεδάμην <τὰ> ῥήτορος ὄργια Μούσης,
οὐδὲ βιβλῶν γενόμεν ἐμπεύραμος, αἶ ῥ' ἐνὶ γαίῃ
παντοίην μερόπεσσι δαημοσύνην ἐδίδαξαν.
Ἀλλ' ἀνέρες ναίοντες ἀν' Ἑλλάδα Βαρβαρίην τε,
ἡμὲν ἐπ' ἡώην τε καὶ ἐσπερίην ὑπὸ πέζαν,
ἦδ' ὅσοι ἐς νοτίην τε καὶ ἀρκτούροιο κελεύθους,
δεῦτε, θεμιστοπόλοι ἱερῆς γίνεσθε θέμιστος.

Archbishop. Aldershot 1997, especially the first chapter "Text and Context". More specifically on occasional texts, see now I. NILSSON, *Writer and Occasion in Twelfth-Century Byzantium: The Authorial Voice of Constantine Manasses*. Cambridge 2020.

- 16 Instead of Leone's printed text *ρητορικῆς*, we here prefer the *lectio* offered by the manuscripts: *ρητορίας*. See mss. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, *Paris. gr.* 2750, fol. 207r; München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, *Monac. gr.* 338, fol. 288r; Cambridge, University Library, *Cantabr. gr.* 1127 (Ee VI 35), fol. 293r; Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, *Laur. plut.* 69.14, fol. 94r. On these manuscripts, see LEONE, *Iambi* (cited n. 1), 127-132 and LEONE, *Historiae* (cited n. 4), VII-XXXIII.

Ἔψια ἦδε βίβλος Τζετζήϊα· δείδια δ' αἰνῶς,
 μὴ κρέα ἐψόμενα γνοίῃ ῥήτωρ [ό] λογογράφος,
 ὃν κείνοι κήρυξαν ὁμοῖον, ὁμοῖοι ἐόντες.
 Ἔψια ἦδε βίβλος, νοέοντες κρίνατε δ' ἔμπης,
 ὥς ὀνύχων κρίνουσιν ὀρειλεχέα τέκνα λεόντων.
 Γνόντες δ' οἷα λόγοισι σοφοὶ κρίνουσι πολῖται,
 ἡμετέρης πόλιος βασιλιῆδος ἐνναετῆρες
 ὀλλυμένην σοφίην συγκλήτου κλαύσατ' ἐρανῆς.¹⁷

This is the book of Tzetzes unskilled in rhetoric
 as said by those who spoke: and the truth they spoke.
 I am unaware, I have not been initiated in the rites of the Muse of rhetoric,
 nor was I skilled in the use of the books¹⁸ which spread
 all kinds of knowledge, teaching men all over the earth.
 But you, men dwelling in the Greek and in the barbarian lands,
 both East and in the far West,
 and you (who inhabit) the South and the paths of North,
 here you are ministers of what is right, of the holy justice.
 This book is a joke by Tzetzes: I am terribly afraid
 that the rhetor, writer of prose might recognize the pieces of meat (already) boiled
 he, whom they proclaimed as equal, being equals.
 This book is a joke, and yet, mindful of that, judge it all the same,
 just as the cubs of the mountain lions are judged from their claws.
 Knowing on the contrary which things the wise citizens judge in speeches
 you, dwellers of our regal city,
 should mourn the detrimental wisdom of the lovely senate.

As happens for the entire corpus, the hexametric poem touches on various motives concerning education, intellectual debates, and literary culture. In particular, the text is built around the word βίβλος, which shapes the structure of the poem. The reference to Tzetzes' book creates partitions within the text, which accordingly can be divided into two parts: vv. 293-301 and vv. 302-309. While in the

17 Tz., Iambi, vv. 293-309 (cited n. 1), 144.

18 Tzetzes' self-presentation as ἀβίβλος is a recurrent theme: unlike his competitors he grounds his knowledge on a proverbial memory rather than on drawing heavily on others' books. On the topic, see M.J. LUZZATTO, Tzetzes lettore di Tucidide. Note autografe sul Codice Heidelberg Palatino Greco 252 (*Paradosis*, 1). Bari 1999, 156-159, and A. PRIZZONE, The Autobiographical Subject in Tzetzes' Chiliades: An Analysis of Its Components, in: CH. MESSIS – M. MULLETT – I. NILSSON (eds.), *Storytelling in Byzantium. Narratological Approaches to Byzantine Texts and Images (Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. Studia Byzantina Upsaliensis*, 19). Uppsala 2018, 287-304.

former section, the βίβλος is expressly ascribed to Tzetzes, who styles himself as unskilled in rhetoric, in the latter emphasis is put on the content of the βίβλος, which ultimately features nothing but ἔψια, that is jokes. Equally, the structure of each part mirrors the other: the focus moves from Tzetzes' self-portrait to the broader Constantinopolitan cultural scene. Through a sort of inductive reasoning, attention shifts from Tzetzes to a given group of (hostile) intellectuals and to their broader environment.

The centrality of the book and the location of the hexameters themselves at the end of the *recensio altera* of the *Historiai* invite to consider the poem as a book epigram.¹⁹ Besides closing the work, it engages directly with its object – the book – and provides a key to reading the entire βίβλος, i.e. the *Historiai*, by reprising and summarizing some of its main topics.

The core-topic of the *Historiai* is presented in the very first line: Tzetzes' book engages with ῥητορίη. Singling out rhetoric as the *Historiai*'s main topic resonates with the words used by Tzetzes at the beginning of his work. Tzetzes' self-exegetical endeavor opens with the epistle to Lachanas, a contemporary grammarian, complete with self-commentary.²⁰ The very title of *Historiai* is drawn from the title given to the commentary on the epistle.²¹ This letter, purposefully selected by Tzetzes, perfectly captures the work's rationale²² providing an introduction to the entire book.

In the prose note preceding the epistle to Lachanas, Tzetzes introduces the letter as follows:

Αὕτη δὲ ἡ ἐπιστολὴ μετέχει τῶν τριῶν εἰδῶν τῆς ῥητορικῆς, ἥ μὲν γὰρ αὐτὸν ὀνειδίζει, τὸ δικανικὸν εἶδος τηρεῖ· ἥ δὲ παραινεί τὸ συμβουλευτικόν· τὸ πανηγυρικὸν δέ· ἥ ταῖς ἱστορίαις τοὺς μὲν ἐγκωμιαστικῶς, τοὺς δὲ μεμπτικῶς ἐπιφέρει.²³

19 On the definition of this specific genre, see F. BERNARD – K. DEMOEN, Book Epigrams, in: A. RHOBY – N. ZAGKLAS – W. HÖRANDNER (eds.), *A Companion to Byzantine Poetry (Brill's Companions to the Byzantine World, 4)*. Leiden – Boston 2019, 404-429. This poem is not included in the *Database of Byzantine Book Epigrams*, www.dbbe.ugent.be (last consulted on 30-04-2021).

20 John Lachanas is one of Tzetzes' rivals. He is the addressee of a short letter of Tzetzes (Tz. *Epistulae* 105, 18-22: P.L.M. LEONE, *Ioannis Tzetzae Epistulae*. Leipzig 1972, 152) and of one by Eustathios (EUSTATHIOS *Epistulae* 48: F. KOLOVOU, *Die Briefe des Eustathios von Thessalonike: Einleitung, Regesten, Text, Indizes [Beiträge zur Altertumskunde, 239]*. Berlin – Boston 2012). On Tzetzes' relationship with Lachanas, see PIZZONE, *The Historiai* (cited n. 3), 200-207.

21 See Tz., *Hist.* (cited n. 4), 1.

22 See PIZZONE, *The Historiai* (cited n. 3), 184-185, 200-207.

23 Tz., *Hist.* IV (cited n. 4), *Epistle ad Lach.*, 471-474.

This very epistle partakes of the three kinds of rhetoric: where it (sc. the epistle) reproaches him (sc. Lachanas), it retains the judicial genre; where it exhorts him, it retains the deliberative one; and it retains the panegyric genre where it cites some people by way of an encomium, others instead by way of a blame.

The epistle to Lachanas concerns all of the three genres of rhetoric, namely the judicial, the deliberative and the encomiastic. Given the relevance of the epistle within the carefully constructed design of the *Historiai*, this description can be regarded as an introduction to the whole work. Just like in the epistle to Lachanas all the three kinds of rhetoric are included in the book.²⁴

In our poem, Tzetzes wraps his work up by emphasizing again the centrality of rhetoric. If in the following third *Iamb* Tzetzes authenticates his work, claiming its originality,²⁵ in the hexameters he brings his work to a close, creating a dialogue with the first letter commented upon in a sort of ring composition.

Tzetzes celebrates the solemnity of the occasion by writing in hexameters. The choice of meter is also part of the careful design. Within the *Historiai*, composed in political verse, Tzetzes resorts several times to hexameters, by either inserting hexametric citations²⁶ or composing new lines. Tzetzes mostly adopts this meter either to elevate the tone or to speak of his own poetics or else to offer explanations on the form he chose, the audience he targeted and broadly the occasions prompting his work. For example, at the end of the second part of the *Historiai*, in *hist.* V 23, 186-201, hexameters are used as a form of *sphragis*.²⁷ Tzetzes informs his readers that the *historiai* referred to the first epistle of his collection have come to an end (186-187) and that the following ones are referred to the second epistle (191-195). This sort of "reading directions" were not supposed to be part of the main text, but were, once again, designed as "book epigram". This becomes evident if we look at the manuscript tradition. In the late 13th-century ms. *Vat. gr.*

24 On the centrality of rhetoric in the polemic against Kamateros, see above n. 13. Moreover, the *hist.* 369 mentioned above opens stressing again how the entire book is closely related to rhetoric: Ἡ βίβλος ἡ ῥητορική [...], Tz., *Hist.* XI 369 (cited n. 4), 102.

25 Tz., *Iambi*, vv. 350-360 (cited n. 1), 146, to be read with PIZZONE, *The Historiai* (cited n. 3), 206-207.

26 On the coexistence of different meters in the *Historiai*, see N. ZAGKLAS, *Metrical Polyvalence and Generic Innovation in the Twelfth Century: The Multimetric Cycles of Occasional Poetry*, in: A. RHOBY – N. ZAGKLAS (eds.), *Middle and Late Byzantine Poetry: Texts and Contexts (Byzantios. Studies in Byzantine History and Civilization, 14)*. Turnhout 2018, 43-70: 46-47, who speaks of a "multimetric symbiosis" and stresses how Tzetzes plays with metrical variations so as to prove his "intellectual skills".

27 See the analysis in AGAPITOS, *John Tzetzes and the Blemish Examiners* (cited n. 7), 26 n. 134.

1369 (fol. 70v),²⁸ for instance, the *sphragis* in hexameters features as a paratext. This multilayered structure is completely lost in the edition provided by Leone, which, by printing the hexameters as a continuation of the previous *historia*, fails to capture the complexity of the text and flattens, as it were, the different layers of composition.²⁹ Be that as it may, in both book epigrams, hexameters are the expressive tool of choice for discourses of meta-poetics.

Hexameters are also well suited for bombastic polemic: one option does not necessarily exclude the other. In the *historia* 369 staging the quarrel against Andronikos Kamateros, for instance, Tzetzes frantically alternates hexameters fraught with Homeric reminiscences with iambic lines, especially when the attack against the *eparchos* reaches its climax.³⁰ The elevated tone combines with invective so as to picture a quarrel of “epic proportion”.³¹ Our poem seems to be driven by the same goal, especially considering that both *historia* 369 and our text – as well as the second part of Tzetzes’ *Epistulae*³² with the relevant commentaries – resonate with the same episode. Tzetzes inserts a hexametric poem between two iambic poems to increase the ‘proportions’ and make his case more dramatic and intense.

To further emphasize epic intensity, the book epigram is filled with Homeric formulas. Tzetzes consistently chooses epic words and forms, such as the correlatives ἡμὲν ... ἡδὲ (vv. 299-300),³³ or the epic singular genitive (v. 200 ἀρκτούροιο) and dative plural (v. 297 μερόπεςσι). In this respect, the rare form ῥητορίας transmitted by the manuscript tradition appears to be particularly fitting. By using this form, Tzetzes conflates epic expressive modules and “modern” language, as ἡ ῥητορία³⁴ was at time used instead of the more classical ἡ ῥητορική. The epic tone is so pervasive that it transforms also the contents of the βίβλος.

28 Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, *Vat. gr.* 1369, fol. 70v. On the ms., see LEONE, *Historiae* (cited n. 4), VII-X, and for its digital version see https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.gr.1369.

29 See above n. 4.

30 Tz., *Hist.* XI 369 (cited n. 4), 210-224.

31 AGAPITOS, John Tzetzes and the Blemish Examiners (cited n. 7), 27, and *passim* for a close analysis of the passage.

32 See in particular the letters addressed to members of the family of the Kamateroi: Tz., *Epp.* 86 and 87 (to Theodoros), 89 (to Theodoros and Andronikos), 90 and 103 (to Andronikos) and 101 (to Demetrios) (cited n. 20), to be read with PIZZONE, Tzetzes and the *prokatastasis* (cited n. 7).

33 As parallels, see for instance HOMER, *Ilias* 9.226-227; 16.212; 17.713.

34 This medieval form is very rare. Even though SUIDAS p 150 (A. ADLER, *Suidae lexicon*, vol. 4 [*Lexicographi Graeci*, 1.4]. Leipzig 1935) explains the verb ῥητορεύω with the analogous form of ῥητορεία, SUIDAS p 151 refers to the more common ῥητορικὴν γραφήν. The same use is found in the *Ἀνωνύμου ἐπιτομὴ ῥητορικῆς* edited by C. Walz. See C. WALZ (ed.),

Δαῖμον: Absence as Presence

As mentioned above, the first part of the poem takes its cues from Tzetzes' self-portrait. As elsewhere in the *Historiai*, Tzetzes pictures himself as unskilled and untaught in the art of rhetoric (ῥητορίας ἀδαήμονος).³⁵ Such a bleak self-representation should be taken as ironic. As Tzetzes himself states also elsewhere in the *Iambs*, the world of education and rhetoric is completely upside down: whereas normally, in any given artisanal activity, the best ones are rewarded, "in the art of speaking, quite the opposite happens".³⁶ Even more explicitly, in the third *Iamb*, Tzetzes says, possibly addressing to Andronikos Kamateros:

Οὕτω δοκεῖ μοι, τοὺς σοφοὺς μὲν βαρβάρους
τοὺς βαρβάρους σοφοὺς δὲ σὺ κρίνεις λόγοις,
πληρῶν ἐν αὐτοῖς τοὺς ἀνακτόρων δόμους.
Τοὺς ἐγγενεῖς δὲ καὶ πολίτας οὐ νόθους,
τῶν ἀρχικῶν τὰ τέκνα καὶ σοφοῦ γένους
θλίβων, παρωθῶν ὧν ἔω κλήσεις γράφειν.³⁷

As it seems to me, you judge *from* their speeches
the wise as barbarians, and the barbarians as wise,
fulfilling the abodes of the lords in their speeches.
Oppressing those who are native and the non-illegitimate citizens
and the children of the commanders and those from wise descentance,
pushing aside those of whom I omit to write down the names.

Rhetorical education is so perverted that it allows figures of obscure lineage to rise socially and unseat traditional elite members. As a result, Tzetzes duly portrays himself as rhetorically unskilled: from his standpoint, in such a world being considered untaught in rhetoric is not a shame but rather a matter of pride.³⁸

Rhetores Graeci, III. Stuttgart – Tübingen 1834, 629, 9. As explained by the author, the epitome is directly connected with John Tzetzes' work on rhetoric (*ibidem*, 615-616).

35 See for instance Tzetzes' self-representation as ἀρηγόρευτος; Tz., Hist. IX 278 (cited n. 4), 656; XI 369, 210 and 223.

36 Tz., Iambi, v. 39: τὰ τῶν λόγων ἔχει δὲ πᾶν τοῦναντίον (cited n. 1), 135. See also Tzetzes' own explanation in the scholion to v. 118 (cited n. 1), 149.

37 Tz., Iambi, vv. 331-336 (cited n. 1), 145.

38 The same rationale informs the foreword in iambs introducing the three poems (see above n. 5). Interestingly, this passage is explicitly concerned with metrical forms. Tzetzes, in particular, wonders why one should care about writing according to the metrical rules when only those unskilled are highly rated? Καὶ τί γὰρ ἂν τις τεχνικῶ γράφοι μέτρῳ / πόδας τε τηροῖ πανταχοῦ καὶ διχρόνους, / καὶ πάντα λεπτῶς ὡς χρεῶν ἀποξέοι, / ἴσων δοκούντων τεχνικῶν καὶ βαρβάρων; / μᾶλλον δὲ πολλοῦ βαρβάρων τιμωμένων / καὶ τῶν ἀτέχνων ὡς σοφῶν κροτουμένων; "For, why one would write according to the metrical

In our hexameters, Tzetzes' alleged lack of rhetorical skillfulness is further emphasized by a wordplay. Tzetzes employs a *figura etymologica*³⁹ – around which the first part of the poem revolves – consistently referring to the pair δαίμων/ἀδάμων. In reporting the words of others, he stages himself as unskilled in rhetoric and uninitiated in the rites of the Muse of rhetoric. He is unskilled also in the all-ranging knowledge taught through books all over the *oikoumene*. Tzetzes is ἀδάμων while the others are imbued with δαημοσύνη.

This *figura etymologica* is further enriched by the pun embedded in it, akin to schedography.⁴⁰ Δαίμων recalls the neutral form δαῖμον, which Tzetzes elsewhere artfully associates to δαιμόνιον in order to convey the meaning of 'intelligence, skill and possession of knowledge'.⁴¹ By going through vv. 293-297 a reader familiar with Tzetzes' work and with his love for verbal puns would likely have been reminded of the wordplay δαῖμον/δαιμόνιον. The whole charade has to be read against the backdrop of Tzetzes' habit of representing himself as wrongly accused of being ignorant of rhetoric and therefore sidelined while other rhetors are acclaimed and celebrated. Our hexameters highlight two different paradoxical absences: on the one hand, Tzetzes lacks rhetorical skills, on the other, his most successful colleagues lack actual ingenuity, their δαημοσύνη notwithstanding.

rules / and retain everywhere also the dichronic feet / and polish everything with style as it is fitting / when the skilled ones and the barbarians are considered equivalent? / Rather instead [one would do that] when the barbarians are by far the most honored and those unskilled are applauded as wise?": Tz., Iambi, vv. 6-11 (cited n. 1), 134.

39 *Figura etymologica* – a rhetorical figure whereby words etymologically related are used in the same passage – combines here four different words: the adjective ἀδάμονος (v. 293), the verb δεδάμκα (a perfect form from *δάω [v. 295]), the noun δαημοσύνη (v. 297) and the verb διδάσκω (v. 297).

40 On the practice of schedography, see P.A. AGAPITOS, *Grammar, Genre and Patronage in the Twelfth Century: Redefining a Scientific Paradigm in the History of Byzantine Literature*. *JÖB* 64 (2014) 1-22; ID., *New Genres in the Twelfth Century: The Schedourgia of Theodore Prodromos*. *Medioevo Greco* 15 (2015) 1-41; ID., *Literary Haute Cuisine and Its Dangers: Eustathios of Thessaloniki on Schedography and Everyday Language*. *DOP* 69 (2015) 225-241; ID., John Tzetzes and the Blemish Examiners (cited n. 7), 7-8. On the evolution of this practice, see A. GIANNOULI, *Education and Literary Language in Byzantium*, in: M. HINTERBERGER (ed.), *The Language of Byzantine Learned Literature (Byzantios. Studies in Byzantine History and Civilization, 9)*. Turnhout 2014, 52-71: 61-64; I. VASSIS – S. KOTZABASSI – I. POLEMIS, *A Byzantine Textbook of the Palaeologan Period. The Schedographic Collection of MS Laurentianus 56.17. Parekbolai* 9 (2019) 33-182.

41 See Ex. in Il. 249, 18-250, 1 (M. ΠΑΡΑΘΟΜΟΡΟΥΛΟΣ, *Ἑξηγησις Ἰωάννου Γραμματικοῦ τοῦ Τζέτζου εἰς τὴν Ὅμηρον Ἰλιάδα*. Athens 2007) and Hist. XII 449 (cited n. 4), 864-867: Δαίμων δὲ καὶ ὁ ἐμπειρὸς καλεῖται καθ' ἑτέρους / δαίμων τις καὶ ἐμπειρὸς ὑπάρχων, ὥσπερ ἔφαν. / Δαίμων καὶ πᾶς ὁ φονικὸς καὶ κοπτικὸς τῷ Τζέτζῃ. / Ἐκ τοῦ δαῖζω δε φησὶ τοῦτο τὴν κλήσιν φέρει.

Following this rationale, Tzetzes' lack of *δαημοσύνη* as intended by his competitors testifies to his intellectual excellence and to him actually possessing what is *δαῖμον*.

This reading seems to be confirmed by other passages in Tzetzes' works where the author presents himself as proudly gifted with ingenuity.⁴² Another very telling passage is to be found in the scholia on Aristophanes' *Pluto* 733 where a further nuance is added to the meaning of *δαῖμον*:

Εἰ δ' ἐπεξηγούμενος ἦν γραφὰς ὁμηρείας ἀνδρὸς ἐν ἅπασι λόγοις ἑνός, ῥήτορος φιλοσόφου γεωμετροῦντος νομογραφοῦντος ἀστρολογοῦντος ἰατρεύοντος αἰγυπτιάζοντος χαλδαῖζοντος συμβολογραφοῦντος, ἀπαξαπλῶς ἐν ἅπασιν εἶδεσι λόγων ὑπερτεροῦντος ἀπάντων ὅσους ἑώρακεν ἥλιος, τῷ δὲ βριθεῖ καὶ στερρῷ τοῦ νοὸς αὐτοδαμονίου τινὸς τελούντος καὶ αὐτονοῦ, μετὰ καὶ ἀπλοῦ καὶ ἀτύφου τοῦ ἥθους καὶ παντοίαις κεκοσμημένου ταῖς χάρισι, καὶ πάντα μέχρι καὶ τραχυτάτης νυγμῆς λογικοῖς τε κανόσι καὶ ἐμπειρίᾳ λεπτῇ πραγμάτων ἀπακριβοῦντος, μὴ μέντοι γε, οἷοί τινές εἰσι τε καὶ δοκοῦσι φιλόσοφοι, ληροῦντες δὲ οἷα ληροῦσι καὶ ἑαυτοὺς ἀνατρέποντες τῷ πρὸς τῷ τοῦ λογισμοῦ σεσεισμένῳ καὶ ἀστηρίκτῳ μηδὲ εἰδέναι ἐνιαχοῦ ὅ τι καὶ φθέγγονται καὶ ὥς πολλαχοῦ ἑαυτοὺς ἀνατρέπουσιν [...], εἶχες ἂν ἐκμανθάνειν σαφέστατα [...].⁴³

If I were commenting on the Homeric works, you would have had definitely to learn thoroughly (*scil.* everything). In fact, Homer is a man by himself in all the *logoi*, a rhetor and a philosopher, one skilled in geometry and a legislator, one studying astrology and practicing medicine, one who is like an Egyptian, one who also follows the Chaldean creed and who uses symbols; in general, one who surpasses in every kind of *logoi* all the people that the sun has seen, one who brings to fulfilment his absolutely ingeniously mind and his absolute intelligence into deep and tenacious thoughts, with simple and not puffed up attitude and adorned with all the kind of graces, describing minutely everything down to the roughest dot through the logical canons and the subtle experience of things. He is certainly not like those who are and seem to be philosophers, who foolishly tell the foolish things they do

42 See for instance Tz., Scholia in Ar. Ran. 843a (cited n. 4), 932.7-933.12, to be read with A. PIZZONE, Cultural Appropriation and the Performance of Exegesis in John Tzetzes' Scholia on Aristophanes, in: P. MARCINIAK – B. VAN DEN BERG – D. MANOLOVA (eds.), Preserving, Commenting, Adapting: Commentaries on Ancient Texts in Twelfth-Century Byzantium. Cambridge (forthcoming).

43 I. TZETZES, Schol. in Ar. Plut. 733, 168, 20-169, 14 (L. MASSA POSITANO [ed.], Jo. Tzetzae Commentarii in Aristophanem, I. Prolegomena et Commentarium in Plutum. Groningen 1960).

and who turn their attention toward the shaken and weak part of the reasoning, often without knowing what they say and sometimes where they direct their attention.

The rather long sentence from which these lines are taken describes Tzetzes' attitude as a commentator. Texts subject to commentary are indeed of different nature and require different competences and attention depending on the expertise of the commented authors. Even though texts are not always worth the effort,⁴⁴ this is certainly the case when Homeric material is at stake. Tzetzes, in particular, offers a brilliant portrait of Homer, depicted as a multitalented author able to enlarge on different *logoi* in a variety of guises, heavily drawing on his erudition and expertise.

If we consider both the frequent overlap between author and commentator⁴⁵ and Tzetzes' self-comparison and ultimately rivalry with Homer,⁴⁶ it is not difficult to detect in Homer's portrait a few traits belonging to Tzetzes himself. The variety of skills and the breath of interests of Homer will remind the reader of the variety of topics present in the *Historiai*. In a way, the same eclecticism integral to Homer is reflected in Tzetzes' work.

Through the portrait of Homer Tzetzes also offers a vivid picture of the attitude that a commentator on Homer should have. Commenting on Homer is tantamount to being confronted with his many instantiations, ranging from rhetor to medical doctor. Homer is naturally αὐτοδαμόνιος, that is an absolute intelligence, a thoughtful and solid mind (τῷ δὲ βριθεῖ καὶ στερρῷ τοῦ νοὸς αὐτοδαμονίου τινὸς τελοῦντος καὶ αὐτονοῦ).⁴⁷ Despite the presence of the image of the creative

44 Comedy, on the contrary, is not worth the effort. See LUZZATTO, Tzetzes lettore (cited n. 18), esp. 45-46, with comments to the passage.

45 On the author and the commentator who "join forces" so that readers do not even need the original text, see E. CULLHED, Eustathios of Thessalonike. Commentary on Homer's Odyssey, vol.1: On Rhapsodies α-β (*Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. Studia Byzantina Upsaliensia*, 17). Uppsala 2016, 11*-13* citing examples from Tzetzes and Eustathios (*ibidem*, nn. 71-72).

46 See at least E. CULLHED, The Blind Bard and 'I': Homeric Biography and Authorial Personas in the Twelfth Century. *BMGS* 38.1 (2014) 49-67, and V.F. LOVATO, Ulysse, Tzetzés et l'éducation à Byzance, in: N.S.M. MATHEOU – TH. KAMPIANAKI – L.M. BONDIOLI (eds.), From Constantinople to the Frontier. The City and the Cities (*The Medieval Mediterranean*, 106). Leiden – Boston 2016, 326-342.

47 On a similar imagery used by Tzetzes to stress the centrality and exceptionality of the *nous*, especially in the relationship with his patrons and in the conception of his work, see V.F. LOVATO, Living by His Wit: Tzetzes' Aristophanic Variations on the Conundrums of a 'Professional Writer'. *BMGS* 45.1 (2021) 42-58.

δαίμων/δαιμόνιον in 12th-century production,⁴⁸ the term Tzetzes uses here, αὐτοδαιμόνιος is a *hapax*. Tzetzes stresses creativity and originality, conveying the idea that Homer's mind also finds inspiration in and by itself. What is δαῖμον is thus internalized.

The same features seem to apply to the δαῖμον alluded to in our verses: δαῖμον does not (only) point to expertise and skills to be acquired through training and experience; rather, it engages with creativity and emphasizes autonomous inspiration. Tzetzes may not be skilled in the art of rhetoric or better he may not be considered as such; he may or may not be initiated in the rites of the Muse of rhetoric. And yet his ingenuity, and accordingly his δαημοσύνη, are inborn and therefore unmatched.

Tzetzes' stability instantiated in his αὐτοδαιμόνιος expertise is the focal point of the poem, both conceptually and spatially, as shown by the geographical image sustaining vv. 298-301.⁴⁹ People dwelling on both the Greek and the Barbarian lands come to Constantinople from all over the *oikoumene* to get an education. And yet, none of them is αὐτοδαιμόνιος. This geographical image stresses a radical difference: Tzetzes is immobile, well grounded in the capital and his inspiration is inborn whereas all the others, spread all over, move pointlessly, reaching for the center. The difference is substantial. Given his inborn inspiration, Tzetzes is self-sufficient. His ingenuity is set on a different level: not only is it still unmatched, but it could not be matched here as Tzetzes and the other are two different "beasts".⁵⁰

These two opposite perspectives brought out by the geographical image are well encapsulated by the ambiguous end of v. 294. Even though the lapidary expression ἀληθέα ταῦτα δὲ εἶπον sounds almost prophetic, it capitalizes once again on the ambivalence conveyed by the verb: εἶπον can be either the first person singular or the third person plural. Thus, the question arises: who is speaking the truth here? Tzetzes or the other people who spoke, uttering their judgements? Not only the question remains open, it also further fuels the ambiguity pervading the text.

48 A reference to creativity and inspiration is often associated to the adverb δαιμονίως. See for instance MICHAEL ITALIKOS, *Epistulae* 45, 299, 16 (P. GAUTIER [ed.], Michel Italikos. *Lettres et Discours* [*Archives de l'Orient Chrétien*, 14]. Paris 1972); and EUSTATHIOS, in *Iliadem* VI 496, 23 (M. VAN DER VALK [ed.], *Eustathii Archiepiscopi Thessalonicensis Commentarii ad Homeri Iliadem pertinentes*, I-IV. Leiden 1971-1987).

49 For other geographical images in Tzetzes' *Iambi*, see as a way of example Tz., *Iambi*, vv. 102-109 (cited n. 1), 137.

50 On the animal imagery, see more details in the sections below.

Constantinople as the Place to Be: Moving in and out the Capital

Throughout his work, Tzetzes often stages himself in strong opposition against various people whom he consistently blames. They are often grouped under labels such as συμμορία, κουστωδία, βαρβάρων κουστωδία, βάρβαροι or βούβαλοι.⁵¹ They represent altogether the 'others', his rivals and competitors in the Komnenian literary and scholarly context. Such 'others' all share the same perverted ideas on education, questionable ethical practices and a very bad opinion of Tzetzes. Accordingly, in our book epigram, Tzetzes' competitors are profiled as coming from all over the *oikoumene*. Moreover, they all share a high rank, or to be more precise, the rank that they have acquired δεῦτε, that is to say in Constantinople. In the geographical image used by Tzetzes the focus zooms in from all the borders of the *oikoumene* to the very centre of the empire. Through spatiality, Tzetzes alludes to the socio-economic zooming in ensuing from the capital's attractive power: people came to Constantinople from all over the world, from both within and outside the borders of the empire. As a matter of fact, Constantinople attracted many foreigners and immigrants who, through education, were there given the opportunity not only to be integrated in the city, but even to reach prestigious positions or the higher strata of society.⁵² The convergence of people in Constantinople turned into a movement of social rise. To put it in Magdalino's words, 12th-century "Constantinople was the place to be because it was the place where outsiders became insiders".⁵³

A vivid picture of this process is offered by Tzetzes himself. In *Hist.* IV 4, which takes its cue from the epistle opening Tzetzes' letter collection,⁵⁴ we read:

Ὅσπερ ὁ παῖς τῶν χωριτῶν ὁ πάνσοφος ἐκεῖνος
τὸν ὄν διὰ ἐπήρειαν πρακτορικὴν καὶ τρόπους

51 On this topic, see the remarks in P.A. AGAPITOS, "Middle-class" Ideology of Education and Language, and the "Bookish" Identity of John Tzetzes, in: Y. STOURAITIS (ed.), *Ideologies and Identities in the Medieval Byzantine World*. Edinburgh (forthcoming).

52 On mechanisms of integration in 12th-century Constantinople, see A. LAIOU, *The Foreigner and the Stranger in 12th Century Byzantium: Means of Propitiation and Acculturation*, in: M.-T. FÖGEN (ed.), *Fremde der Gesellschaft*. Frankfurt 1991, 71-97. That the foreigner element is central to the polemic of our paratexts is moreover confirmed once again by the Tzetzes' scholia, which, in describing the ὑποφορά, that is the introduction of the opponents views, he states that they are worth of exile to foreign lands, just like those who were ostracized in Athens: scholion at v. 22 (cited n. 1), 147.

53 P. MAGDALINO, *Paphlagonians in Byzantine High Society*, in: S. LAMPAKIS (ed.), *Byzantine Asia Minor (6th-12th cent.)*. Athens 1998, 141-150: 152.

54 Tz., Ep. 1 (cited n. 20), 1-4, 13 is addressed to Epiphanius, nephew of the Metropolitan of Side. On its strong programmatic character, see PIZZONE, *The Historiai* (cited n. 3), 185.

θέλοντες ἔχειν βοηθὸν ἦγον τῇ Κωνσταντίνου,
 ὡς ἀντιλέγειν διδαχθῇ πρακτόρων ἐπηρείαις.
 Ὡν δὲ πανευφύεστατος χρημάτων δόσει πόση,
 ἄλφα καὶ βῆτα ἔμαθε καὶ γάμμα δὲ σὺν τούτοις.
 Ὅν καὶ λαβόντες ἐν τιμῇ πάλιν οἱ συμφυλέται,
 πρὸς τὴν πατρίδα τὴν αὐτῶν ἤγαγον καὶ τὴν χώραν,
 δεινὸν ἀντισοφίστευμα πρακτορικῆς πικρίας,
 τοῦ πράκτορος δὲ λέγοντος πολλά τε καὶ ποικίλα,
 αὐτὸς ὢν μεγιστόφωνος καὶ τῶν βαρβαροφώνων,
 ἄλφα βῆτα καὶ γάμμα τε ἀνέκραζε συχνάκις.
 Οἱ βούβαλοι ἐβόων δε τερπόμενοι ἐκείνῳ,
 συγκόψει δ' ἡμέτερος τοῦτον σοφοῖς ἐν λόγοις.⁵⁵

Just like that kid from the country – he was famously intelligent –
 whom they, given the abuses and the habits of tax collectors,
 wanted as help and therefore took to Constantinople
 so that he could be instructed on how to resist the abuses of tax-collectors.
 Being the most naturally talented among them thanks to such a large donation
 he learned alfa, beta and gamma together with those.
 His fellow-people taking him back again with great honors
 led him to their homeland and the country,
 a terribly clever device against the tax collectors' harshness;
 but while the tax collector was saying many and complex things,
 he, who was the loudest even among those speaking a barbarian language,
 the youngster raised up his voice shouting repeatedly alfa, beta and gamma.
 The buffaloes jubilated rejoicing at him,
 "Our man will chop up him in his wise words".

Coming from a provincial area, youngsters arrived in Constantinople where –
 with the support offered by their συμφυλέται – they could be educated and gain
 access to higher administrative positions, as fiscal agents for instance. As it is
 made clear by the *historia* mentioned above, Tzetzes does not take kindly the
 entire process. He depicts the poor boy as filled with a deceptive knowledge, one
 that ultimately will not help him or his fellow-countrymen to resist the abuses of
 tax collectors. Moreover, Tzetzes uses the example of this youngster coming from
 the countryside in a *historia* discussing morons:⁵⁶ this country boy does not reach
 his goal and he becomes the perfect and most straightforward symbol of idiots!

55 Tz., Hist. IV 4 (cited n. 4), 849-862.

56 The title of this *historia* reads: Περὶ Μελιτίδου καὶ λοιπῶν μωρῶν.

The twofold movement, first converging toward the center of the Byzantine Empire and then upwards in the social ladder is instantiated in the letter that Tzetzes sent to his ex-slave Demetrios Gobinos. The former slave – possibly to be understood as a private helper who received a salary for his work⁵⁷ – after escaping Tzetzes' service lives wandering and selling sausages.⁵⁸ In the letter, Tzetzes urges his now former slave to come back to Constantinople:

Εἰ μὲν οὖν, ὡς ἔφην, δουλείαν ἐκκλίνων οὕτως ἀγυρτεύων περιαλᾷ καὶ ἑαυτὸν κακουχεῖς, οὐκ εὐφρονος ἔργον ποιεῖς καὶ σεαυτὸν ἀνιάς ἀποστερούμενος μεγίστης τιμῆς τε καὶ ἀγιότητος, ἦν νῦν οἱ ἐμοὶ συμπατριῶται, τῆς βασιλίδος τὰ θρέμματα, οὐ πολὺ σοῦ βδελυρωτέροις ἀνθρώποις προσάπτουσιν.⁵⁹

If to avoid slavery, as I said, in this way you live as a vagabond begging around and you injure yourself, you do not do anything reasonable, you distress yourself and you deprive yourself of the greatest honor and of holiness, the one that now my fellow citizens, those bred in the regal city, attribute to men not much more disgusting than you.

Constantinople is presented by Tzetzes as the place to be, even for a slave: the city can offer great honors and a reputation of holiness to any kind of men. What is more, Tzetzes provides his ex-slave with practical and extremely detailed advice on how to stage an actual performance: Gobinos should dress as a monk and act as a saint, which is all what is needed to *be* a saint in Constantinople. The consequences of such a performance are clearly described by Tzetzes:

Εὐθὺς τοῦτον ἡ Κωνσταντίνου ἀγῆλατεῖ ταῖς τιμαῖς καὶ ὑψηλῷ τῷ κηρύγματι ὁ τρισαλιτήριοις ἀνακηρύττεται⁶⁰ ἅγιος ὑπὲρ τοὺς ἀποστόλους, ὑπὲρ προφήτας, ὑπὲρ τοὺς μάρτυρας, ὑπὲρ πᾶν ὅποσον θεῷ εὐηρέστησε.⁶¹

Immediately, the city of Constantine will drive out the course with honors

57 On the Byzantine concept of slavery (δουλεία) and its various implications, see A.P. KAZHDAN, *The Concept of Freedom (eleutheria) and Slavery (duleia) in Byzantium*, in: G. MAKDISI – D. SOURDEL – J. SOURDEL-THOMINE (eds.), *La notion de liberté au Moyen Age. Islam, Byzance, Occident*. Paris 1985, 215-226: 220-224.

58 On the Aristophanic imagery sustaining this letter, see AGAPITOS, "Middle-class" (cited n. 51). On this letter, Demetrios and Tzetzes' attitude toward the monks, see P. MAGDALINO, *The Byzantine Holy Man in the Twelfth Century*, in: S. HACKEL (ed.), *The Byzantine Saint*. London 1981, 51-66: 53-55, and P. ROILLOS, *Satirical Modulations in 12th-Century Greek Literature*, in: P. MARCINIAK – I. NILSSON (eds.), *Satire in the Middle Byzantine Period. The Golden Age of Laughter? (Explorations in Medieval Culture, 12)*. Leiden – Boston 2020, 258-274: 262-263.

59 Tz., Ep. 104 (cited n. 20), 150, 23-151, 1.

60 On the use of this specific verb, see below.

61 Tz., Ep. 104 (cited n. 20), 151, 17-21.

and with the highest proclamation the thrice sinful will be extolled saint over the apostles, over the prophets, over the martyrs, over everything will be pleased to God.

Regardless of the original condition of the man acting as a saint, once in Constantinople, he will be of the highest repute. The letter's conclusion reinforces the same idea:

Καὶ νῦν κατὰ τὴν Κωνσταντίνου σιγᾶται μὲν Πέτρου ἢ ἄλυσις, τιμᾶται δὲ κλέπτου ἢ κλάπωσις, ἄλλος δ' ἄλλω ῥέζουσι κλεπτῶν αἰειγενετῶν, οὐ γὰρ πάντων ἐστὶν ὁμὸς θρόος οὐδ' ἴα γῆρυς, ἀλλὰ γλῶσσα μέμικται, πολύκλεπτοι δ' εἰσὶν ἄνδρες. Ἐλθὲ γοῦν, ἐλθὲ τὴν ταχίστην, ἵνα καὶ σὺ τρισκαιδέκατος ἄθλος⁶² τῇ Κωνσταντίνου γενήσῃ καὶ λάβῃς πυραμοῦντα νικητικώτατον, μόνον περὶ τὴν σκευὴν τῆς νῦν ἀγιότητος διαπονήθητι ἄριστα. Ἐρρωσο, ὁ τῆς Κωνσταντίνου μετὰ βραχὺ γενησόμενος ἅγιός τε καὶ ὑπεράγιος.⁶³

And now in the city of Constantine the chain of Peter is glossed over, but the bondage of the feet of the thief is honored, 'one makes offers to another one among those who will always be thieves' 'for there is neither a common murmur of all nor the same voice, but the language is mixed, and the men are very devious'. But you come, come as soon as possible so that you too will become the thirteenth contest for the city of Constantine! You will get the victorious prize and pay only attention to work hard in the best way for the dress of the now holiness. Greeting to you who will become holy and supremely holy in a short time in the city of Constantine.

Constantinople is depicted by Tzetzes as the city where to be considered and to be proclaimed a saint is enough to become one. In this letter Tzetzes stresses the poor social condition of his ex-slave outside of Constantinople so as to ironically invite him to improve his stand by moving back to the capital. The emphasis lies on the social advancement that can be achieved only in the Byzantine capital, the only place where any perverted repute could be turned into a saintly one through well-defined rituals of display. More details are added to this already unflattering picture in the *Historia* commenting on this epistle:

Οὐ γὰρ πάντων ἐστὶν ὁμὸς θρόος, οὐδ' ἴα γῆρυς,
ἀλλὰ γλῶσσα μέμικται, πολύκλεπτοι δ' εἰσὶν ἄνδρες·
οἱ πόλιν γὰρ τὴν ἄνασσαν γελῶντες Κωνσταντίνου,
οὐχὶ μιᾶς φωνῆς εἰσι καὶ ἔθνους ἐνὸς μόνου,

62 This is clearly a reference to the twelve labors of Heracles, for which see below.

63 Tz., Ep. 104 (cited n. 20), 152, 5-15.

μίξεις γλωσσῶν δε περισσῶν, ἄνδρες τῶν πολυκλέπτων,
 Κρήτες καὶ Τοῦρκοι, Ἀλανοί, Ῥόδιοι τὲ καὶ Χῖοι,
 ἀπλῶς ἔθνους τοῦ σύμπαντος, τῶν ἀπασῶν χωρῶν τε
 ἅπαντες οἱ κλεπτίστεροι καὶ κεκιβδηλευμένοι,
 χειροτονοῦνται ἅγιοι τῇ πόλει Κωνσταντίνου.
 Ὡ τῆς τοσαύτης ὕβρεως ἀνθρώποις τῶν ἀσκόπων.⁶⁴

For there is neither a common murmur of all nor the same voice,
 but the language is mixed, and the men are very devious.
 Those who laugh at the queen city of Constantine
 they do not have a single voice, they do not have a single tribe
 they are mixtures of extravagant languages, men among the very devious,
 Cretans and Turks, Alans, Rhodians and people from Chios,
 simply of the whole tribe and of all the regions,
 all are the most arrant thieves and perverted,
 they are appointed as holy in the city of Constantine.
 It is such an arrogance for men from among the inconsiderate ones.⁶⁵

The poor state of Constantinople is caused by the arrival of outsiders from other areas of the empire. What was only implied in the letter to Gobinos, i.e. migration from outside into the capital, is clearly spelled out here. Tzetzes describes Constantinople as a chaotic place where different foreign languages are mixed together.⁶⁶ The worst and most devious individuals arrive in the imperial city, invading it, as it were. All these people migrating to Constantinople, in Tzetzes' eyes, are nothing but barbarians, in terms of both provenience and culture.⁶⁷

64 Tz., Hist. XIII 483 (cited n. 4), 354-363.

65 The quite rare term ἄσκοπος is found also in Tz., Schol. in Ar. Ran. 775a (cited n. 4), 901, 4 where it is associated with ἀτέχνων and ἀντιλογιῶν.

66 Even Tzetzes displays his knowledge of foreign languages in the well-known passage closing his *Theogony*, in a way embodying the linguistic mix of Constantinople: Tz., *Theog.* 761-823, esp. 766-800 (I. BEKKER [ed.], *Die Theogonie des Johannes Tzetzes*, aus der bibliotheca Casanatensis [Ms. J. II. 10] herausgegeben. *Philologische und historische Abhandlungen der Königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin aus dem Jahre 1840*. Berlin 1842, 147-169 [repr. in: I. BEKKER, *Opuscula academica Berolinensia. Gesammelte Abhandlungen zur Klassischen Altertumswissenschaft, Byzantinistik und Romanischen Philologie*, 1826-1871. Leipzig 1974, 443-465]) to be read with AGAPITOS, John Tzetzes and the Blemish Examiners (cited n. 7), 36-48.

67 On the variation of the concept of "barbarian", see V.F. LOVATO, *Hellenising Cato? A Short Survey of the Concepts of Greekness, Romanity and Barbarity in John Tzetzes' Work and Thought*, in: K. STEWART – J.M. WAKELEY (eds.), *Cross-cultural Exchange in the Byzantine World, c. 300-1500 AD. Selected papers from the XVII International Graduate Conference of the Oxford University Byzantine Society (Byzantine and Neohellenic Studies, 14)*. Oxford 2016, 143-157.

Eventually, the two-faced saints and the strangers coming to the city overlap as they are part of the same perverted mechanism according to Tzetzes.⁶⁸

While in the passages above Tzetzes disparagingly attacks the hypocritical holy men thriving in the capital, in our poem the immigrants coming from all over the *oikoumene* are presented slightly differently. Tzetzes underlines, using a Homeric term, θεμιστοπόλοι,⁶⁹ that, once in Constantinople (δεῦτε), they become “ministers of the right and of the holy justice”. The “holy” rites through which they are celebrated immediately call to mind the rites of the Muse of rhetoric in which they were initiated. This loose definition thus includes both ministers of religion and judges of speeches. Tzetzes seems to refer to the same category of people in another passage of the *Historiai*, where again he stages himself as being in contrast with a competing group: “them” again. In this passage, where Tzetzes mentions a debate around a statue by Lysippus, the θεμιστοπόλοι are described in more detail:

Ἄνθρωποι δοκησίσσοφοι τινὲς ἐκ φιλοσόφων,
περὶ τῖάρα, τρίβωνι καὶ ἀρχιερωσύνῃ,
καὶ συμμορίαῖς δόκησιν οὐχὶ μικρὰν λαβόντες
βίου στήλην ὠνόμαζον, κατεκομπολακύθουν,
οὐ μὴν γε χρόνου ἔφασκον εἰκόνα πεφυκέναι,
τὴν ἦν στήλην ὁ Λύσιππος εἰργάσατο, ὡς ἔφην·
τῶν ὦν γελῶν τὸν τύφον τε καὶ τὴν ἀνοησίαν

68 If confirmed, this interpretation would perhaps add a further piece of evidence to the polemic against Andronikos Kamateros, criticized not only as a patron of learning but also in his political and institutional capacity. Andronikos in fact was the city *eparchos*, post that Tzetzes always underlines when addressing him (e.g. Tz., Ep. [cited n. 20], 103). Even though the tasks of the *eparchos* are not clearly defined especially in respect of people migrating to Constantinople, a section of the *Book of Eparch* seems to suggest his involvement in the question. See in particular *Book of Eparch* 20, 1-3 (J. KODER [ed.], *Das Eparchenbuch Leons des Weisen. Einführung, Edition, Übersetzung und Indices* [CFHB, 33]. Wien 1991) where the tasks of the *legatarios*, the deputy of the *eparch* are listed. The *legatarios* had to control the merchants entering Constantinople and to check both their wares and their permanence in the capital. Even though the hypothesis of a connection between the control and the access of strangers in the capital and the role of the *eparchos* needs a larger base of investigation, perhaps this motif too is hinted at in the polemic against Kamateros.

69 The term is found for instance in the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* (103). Tzetzes knows also Hesiod's use of the term, as shown by *Ex. in Il.*, 2.47-48 (95.4-5, cited n. 41): “Ἕλλη- νες δ' ἐγένοντο θεμιστοπόλου βασιλῆος / Δῶρός τε Ξοῦθός τε καὶ Αἴολος ἱπποχάρμης, as he refers in his works. On the use of the term, see also EUST., in *Il.* II 140-141 (cited n. 48), and Theodore Prodromos, *Carmina historica* 56c (W. HÖRANDNER, Theodoros Prodromos. *Historische Gedichte* [WBS, XI]. Wien 1974, 464-465).

ἀπέδειξα τρανότατα καθηγουμένῳ γράφων,
 πρὸς ὃν ἐκεῖνοι πρότερον ἐλήρουν τὰ τοιαῦτα.
 [...] Βίου δ' εἰκόνα μέχρι νῦν οὐδεὶς ἐφάνη πλάσας.
 Βίον ἐγὼ δὲ ζωγραφεῖν οὕτω ζωγράφοις λέγω,
 ἄνθρωπον γράφειν μὲν λαμπρόν, θρόνους, ἀρχάς, ἐπάρσεις,
 καὶ θύελλαν βαθύσκοτον, κρύπτουσιν αἴφνης πάντα.⁷⁰

Some men from among the philosophers, seemingly wise,
 by the miter, the threadbare cloak and the high priesthood
 and the *symmorai*⁷¹ have a repute that is not small,
 called it a “statue of life”, boasting loudly about it,
 they don't certainly say that this was an image of time,
 referring as I said to the statue made by Lysippus.
 Laughing at them, I exposed their arrogance and their mindlessness
 writing in the clearest way to the abbot,
 to whom they explained earlier foolishly such nonsenses.
 [...] Up to now, nobody seems to have shaped an image of life.
 I say to the painters to paint life in this way,
 to represent a brilliant man, thrones, commands, elevations,
 and a murky storm, which suddenly conceals everything.

Here, the ministers are depicted as men supposedly wise who have a great reputation among clergy and monks. We are speaking again like in the case of Tzetzes' former slave Gobinos of monks and ascetic saints probably alluded to by τριβῶν.⁷² And yet the picture is here more inclusive as it comprises also more advanced posts both in the ecclesiastic and in the secular ladder, as the mention of the tiara seems to suggest.⁷³ Tzetzes portrays this group of people while discussing about the interpretation of the statue of Time sculpted by Lysippus. Bragging about it, they suggested a new and exceptional reading, understanding it as a portrayal of life. Tzetzes' reaction at their interpretation is nothing but laughing. They do not consider how fleeting fame is and that their fame is very time-dependent: it fades out as time passes or circumstances change. Tzetzes laughs about them and their ἀνοησία as they deserve nothing but this. Ultimately, the recognition obtained by the power groups listed in the first lines mentioned above is not worth much. Once again Tzetzes represents the same perverted – according to him – mechanism governing both education and society. In the end, the only

70 Tz., Hist. X 323 (cited n. 4), 268-287.

71 On this term, see more extensively below.

72 On the allusion to the monks, see also below.

73 For an explanation of both τριβῶν and τιάρα in Tzetzes' own words, see Tz., Hist. VIII 189 (cited n. 4), 294-305. In particular, with τιάρα Tzetzes seems to allude to secular power.

thing left is Tzetzes' laugh, which resonates all over the *oikoumene* as vividly described in the last lines of first iambic poem, directly preceding our hexameters:

Οὔτοι δοκοῦσι τῶν σοφῶν καὶ κοσμίῳν·
τὰ δ' ἄλλα κωφά, καὶ πλατύς ἐστι γέλως.⁷⁴

They seem to be among the wise and the honorable men,
but all the rest is deaf, and the laugh is wide.

Scathing Amusements and Feral Disguises

Laughter and humor dominate also the second part of the poem, which follows the same structure as the first one as well as same discursive strategies. At lines 302-306 Tzetzes focuses again on his own alleged lack of poetic prowess using a word play, while lines 306-to the end center on the pitiable state of Constantinople's cultural life.

The wordplay sustaining lines 302-306 is based on the meaning of ἔψια and its assonance with ἐψόμενα, on which I will enlarge in a moment. It also, more broadly, dovetails with Tzetzes' modes of self-representation in connection with his work on rhetoric and his clash with the Kamateroi, as we shall see.

Ἐψια is a rare word, for which we have a few entry in Byzantine lexica.⁷⁵ Taking his cue from the Homeric verb, ἐψιάω "to amuse", Eustathios too expands on the term, which suggests an interest for the rare form in the environment of schools/rhetorical training.⁷⁶ As clarified by Eustathios, ἔψια is synonym with παίγνια, an equivalence testified to also by a marginal gloss to our line in the *Par. gr.* 2750.⁷⁷ Eustathios' clarification goes as follows:

Ἐπεὶ καὶ ἔψια, φασί, τὰ παίγνια, ὅθεν τὸ ἐψιάσθαι. Ταυτὸν δὲ ἐφεψιάσθαι καὶ καθεψιάσθαι, ἐπεὶ, ὡς καὶ προεσημειώθη, ἐν πολλοῖς ἢ ἐπὶ πρόθεσις τῇ κατὰ ἰσοδυναμεῖ.⁷⁸

For jokes, they say, are also *epsia*, and from there (we have) *epsiasthai*. *Ephepsiasthai* and *kathepsiasthai* are the same, given that, as we also have mentioned before, in many occurrences the prefix *epi* has the same value as *kata*.

74 Tz., Iambi, vv. 291-292 (cited n. 1), 144.

75 Cf. for example SUIDAS, ε 4064 (cited n. 34); Ps. ZONARAS, ε 944, 5 (I.A.H. TITTMANN, Iohannis Zonarae lexicon ex tribus codicibus manuscriptis, 2 voll. Lipsiae 1808 [Amsterdam 1967]).

76 Homer in fact already knows the verb, whereas later sources also show the form ἐψία, -ας. There seems to be also uncertainty about the breathing, which is at times rough at times sweet. The *Par. gr.* 2750 has rough spirit. For Eustathios, see EUST., in Il. II 206 (cited n. 48), 28-31.

77 See Tz., Hist. (cited n. 4), 151, 35.

78 EUST., in Il. II 206 (cited n. 48), 29-31.

Based on this explanation, in our hexameters Tzetzes presents his own book as the result of light humor and jesting. This qualification is striking and suggests caution in taking what we find in the *Historiai* at face value.

Not surprisingly frisky wordplays are at stake also in these lines. Lines 302-306 capitalize on both the analogy between literary and alimentary consumption common in the Komnenian era,⁷⁹ and on the widespread animal imagery used by Tzetzes.⁸⁰ On the one hand Tzetzes points to the fact that his defiant attitude is somewhat hidden behind the humorous tone; on the other, however, he makes clear that his style is still unmistakable and the anonymous rhetor he addresses will probably recognize his boisterous aggressivity behind the humor. Ἐψόμενα κρέα at v. 303 creates an assonance with ἔψια while evoking the idea of a literary banquet. Tzetzes seems to imply that rhetorical elaboration, the way he has “cooked up” his text both literally and metaphorically, has made hard to recognize the real animal behind the juicy meat.

The point is better understood if read against v. 304: Tzetzes’ alludes here once again to the close-knit group he targets throughout the iambs. Members of this group, with strong links to the court, supported each other, glorifying their own achievements and intellectual performances.⁸¹ As mentioned in the introduction, the four poems edited by Leone are connected with, and prompted by, the polemic against the Kamateroi and Andronikos in particular.⁸² Both the Kamateroi and their supporters are consistently labeled and described as “edible” animals: pigs, goats, buffaloes, even eels and squids.⁸³ Therefore, when Tzetzes says that his anonymous addressee is acknowledged “as equal by equals”, he hints at distinctive social practices on which we will expand in the next section, but he also implies that the addressee and his group belong to the same species. Tzetzes, on the contrary, is a completely different animal. At v. 305 he warns whomever will judge his book (i.e. the *Historiai*), inviting them to pay attention and look

79 See AGAPITOS, *Literary Haute Cuisine* (cited n. 40). As we shall see further, such imagery was also partly prompted by the actual material circumstances in which texts were produced and consumed.

80 See below p. 149, and M. LAUXTERMANN, *Buffaloes and bastards: Tzetzes on metre*, in: PRODI (ed.), *Τζετζικάι ἔρπειναι* (cited n. 7).

81 See above and also the description provided at lines 81-89, in: Tz., *Iambi* (cited n. 1), 136-137.

82 See above p. 124-125 and 131-132.

83 See PIZZONE, *Tzetzes and the Prokatastasis* (cited n. 7); for all the relevant passages and the hitherto unedited iambs against an anonymous “son of a goat” see N. BIANCHI, *Il figlio del capro e il libro sfregiato. Versi inediti di Tzetzes πρὸς τινὰ κόψαντα μέρος τοῦ τόμου τῶν στίχων* (*Laur. Conv. soppr.* 627, ff. 20v-21r), in: PRODI (ed.), *Τζετζικάι ἔρπειναι* (cited n. 7).

carefully beyond the jokes to appreciate his claws – shall we assume that those cannot burn even if cooked? – which reveal his true (aggressive) nature and skills.

The mention of mountain lions at v. 306 immediately calls to mind the finale of the iambic poem edited by Pétridès in 1903, where Tzetzes evokes his quarrel with one Skylitzes and the imperial secretary Gregorios, an affair discussed also in epp. 89 and 90 addressed to the Kamateroi.⁸⁴ The iambs are a violent attack against a new generation of “buffalos” and “billy goats” that unwisely set off to challenge a mountain lion. In the Pétridès-poem the nature of the wild animal is described as πετροστεγής (v. 4), while the young buffalos and billy goats are invited to leave the lion alone sleeping in his den, without waking him up (vv. 8-9). As Valeria Lovato has brilliantly shown, Tzetzes' identification with the wild animal is both in tune with his physical self-portrait and likely implies an astrological reference to his date of birth.⁸⁵ To her observations we can add a detail that can be gathered from Tzetzes' letter-collection and suggests that Tzetzes used is “leonine identity” within satirical, ironic or polemic contexts.

Letter 16 is built on the overlap between Tzetzes' textual identities. The epistle is addressed to an unnamed bishop who had sent to Tzetzes a εὐλογία, which – as he complains – his addressee had not received with the due gratitude. Therefore, he had urged Tzetzes to be true to his name – that is John – which, as explained in the relevant *historia*, comes from Hebrew and means “endowed with χάρις”.⁸⁶ The title of the letter suggests that in his reply Tzetzes had worn – so to say – the skin of the lion and that the anonymous bishop had “glossed” the term “lion” with the name “John”:

Πρὸς ἐπίσκοπον ἀξιοῦντα μετ' εὐγνωμοσύνης τὰ στελλόμενα παρ' αὐτοῦ
δέχεσθαι καὶ Ἰωάννη τὸν λέοντα ἐπιγράψαντα πρὸς ὃν ἐστέλλετο τὰ στελ-
λόμενα.⁸⁷

To a bishop asking him to accept with gratitude the missives sent by him and glossing with “John” the lion to which the missives were sent.

84 For the poem see S. PÉTRIDÈS, Vers inédits de Jean Tzetzés. *BZ* 12 (1903) 568-570. On the episode see N. ZAGKLAS, Satire in the Komnenian Period: Poetry, Satirical Strands, and Intellectual Antagonism, in: MARCINIAK – NILSSON (eds.), *Satire in the Middle Byzantine Period* (cited n. 58), 279-303; and PIZZONE, *Tzetzes and the Prokatasias* (cited n. 7), both with further bibliography.

85 V.F. LOVATO, *La ricezione di Odisseo e di Omero presso Giovanni Tzetze e Eustazio di Tessalonica*, Tesi di dottorato presentata all'Università di Losanna e all'Università di Torino. Torino 2017, 282-284. Even if she does not connect the lion with Heracles, Lovato aptly stresses how the labors, which included the dirty task at Augias' stables, could fit very well into the fecal imagery used by Tzetzes against his opponents (*ibidem*, 212).

86 Tz., *Hist.* VII (cited n. 4), 126.

87 Tz., *Ep.* 16 (cited n. 20), 29, 1-5.

The meaning of the title is further clarified in the body of the letter, where the reference to the name is made more explicit:

Ἡμεῖς γάρ ἐσμεν οὐκ ἀγνώμονες, κᾶνπερ πρὸς σὲ πρότερον ἀκραιφνεστάτη φιλία τὴν παρρησίαν λαβόντες ἡστεῖσάμεθα. Σὺ δ' ὡς ἐγῶμαι καὶ ὡς βοροῦς καὶ φάγους ἡμᾶς δεδοικῶς καὶ θηριώδεις εἶναι νομίζων, καὶ τὴν ἡμῶν λεοντῶνυμον κλῆσιν ὡς θηριῶνυμον μετακαλέσας μετέτρεψας πρὸς ἰλαράν τε καὶ χαριτῶνυμον. Ἄλλ' εὖ ἴσθι ὡς κακῶς ἡμᾶς νομίζεις ἀγνώμονας· ἡμεῖς γὰρ λίαν εὐγνώμονες καὶ ὑπὲρ τὴν Λυδικὴν λίθον τὴν βάσανόν ἐσμεν τοῦ δέοντος ἐπιγνώμονες.⁸⁸

For we are not ungrateful, even if we have previously been joking urbanely, speaking freely due to our extreme feelings of friendship for you. However, fearing – as I believe – that we might be voracious and biting and considering us feral, you have also changed our leonine name, bearer of wildness, turning it into a cheerful one, bearer of grace. However, rest assured that you are wrong in believing we are unconsiderate: for we are exceedingly considerate, and we can be even better at considering the merits of what is appropriate than the Lydian stone.

These lines are extremely relevant to understand the rationale of our book epigram. Besides suggesting that Tzetzes might have used “Leo” as a *nom de plume* for occasional pieces, it signals that he purposely played with expressive ambiguity, so much so that even his contemporaries could be mistaken as regards his communicative intentions. The reference to the Lydian touchstone,⁸⁹ used, according to the legend, to test gold and silver also implies deception and disguise, and the need to find a key, as it were, to tell apart truth and pretense. It is also a powerful warning call to not take Tzetzes’ banter – even when they appear to be extremely violent – at face value.

Tzetzes comes back to the Lydian stone also in the scholia to Aristophanes’ *Frogs*, where he adds an intriguing note:

Βάσανός ἐστι λυδικὴ λίθος, ἥτις ἡρακλεία λέγεται, ἢ ἀπὸ τῆς Ἡρακλείας πόλεως, ἢ ἀπὸ τοῦ Ἡρακλέους, ὡς ἰσχυρὰ καὶ αὕτη ὥσει ἐκεῖνος, ἢ προστριβόμενον διακρίνεται τὸ χρυσίον, εἰ καθαρὸν ἐστὶν εἴτε κίβδηλον.⁹⁰

The Lydian stone is a touchstone and they call it also Heracleian, either from the city of Heracleia or from Heracles, since it is as strong as him and by rubbing it one can judge whether the gold is pure or false.

88 Tz., Ep. 16 (cited n. 20), 30, 13-31, 2.

89 Explained in Tz., Hist. VII 127 (cited n. 4).

90 Tz., Schol. in Ar. Ran. 616a (cited n. 4), 863, 8-10.

The last passage proves that the reference to the lion belongs to a nexus of images that lend themselves, as we argue, to accommodate one more layer of meaning, consistent with modes of self-presentation recurring in Tzetzes' oeuvre. The letter collection shows that Tzetzes tends to equate his own condition to that of Heracles, *especially* when dealing with the Kamateroi. In Ep. 87, addressed to Theodoros Kamateros, we read:

Ἀρρώστως ἔχω καὶ ἀσθενῶς καὶ πόνοις ἐπιβάλλειν οὐ σθένω, τετράδι δέ, ὡς
 ἔοικε, γεννηθεὶς ἄλλοις πονῶ.⁹¹

I feel ill and weak, and I am not up to labouring, and yet, born on the fourth,
 as it seems, I am labouring for others.

The meaning of the phrase is clarified in *Historia* XII 417 where Tzetzes makes the reference to Heracles explicit:

Τὸν Ἡρακλῆν λέγουσι μηνὸς τετράδι
 τεχθέντα πολλὰ τληπαθεῖν ἐν τῷ βίῳ,
 ἄθλους τελοῦντα προσταγαῖς Εὐρυσθέως.
 Ἀφ' οὗπερ ἐκράτησεν ἡ παροιμία,
 ἄλλοις πονοῦσι προσφυῶς λελεγμένη.⁹²

They say that Heracles, born on the fourth of the month,
 had to suffer many trials in his life,
 accomplishing the labors by the order of Eurystheus.
 Because of that the proverb became established,
 said fittingly of those who labor for others.

This, however, is not the first time that Tzetzes equates himself to Heracles. One of the paratexts of the Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, *Vossianus graecus* Q1⁹³ takes the form of a long book epigram⁹⁴ in iambs in which Tzetzes compares his

91 Tz., Ep. 87 (cited n. 20), 127, 16-17.

92 Tz., Hist. XII 417 (cited n. 4), 503-507. Cf. ZENOBIOS, *Epitome* VI 7 (F.G. SCHNEIDEWIN – E.L. VON LEUTSCH, *Corpus paroemiographorum Graecorum*, vol. 1. Göttingen 1839); HESYCHIOS, τ 613 (I.C. CUNNINGHAM – P.A. HANSEN, *Hesychii Alexandrini lexicon*, vol. 4 [*Sammlung griechischer und lateinischer Grammatiker*, 11/4]. Berlin – New York 2009); SUIDAS, τ 388 (cited n. 34); PHOTIOS, *Lexicon*, τ 190 (C. THEODORIDIS, *Photii Patriarchae Lexicon*, vol. 3, N-Φ. Berlin – Boston 2013), based on PHILOCHOROS fr. 328 F 85b Jacoby; EUST., in Il. I 469 (cited n. 48), 3-4. See also the modern Greek translation in I. ΓΡΗΓΟΡΙΑΔΗΣ, Ἰωάννης Τζέτζης, Ἐπιστολαί. Εἰσαγωγή-Μετάφραση-Σχόλια. Athens 2001, 225, 287 n. 293.

93 See also the iambs closing the commentary, in which Tzetzes states that with his exegesis he surpassed Heracles' labors (ff. 211v-212r).

94 On the genre see BERNARD – DEMOEN, *Book Epigrams* (cited n. 19). The epigram is included – although not in its complete form – in the Database of Byzantine Book Epigrams

own exegesis on Aphthonios and Hermogenes to Heracles' labors, asserting the superiority of his own enterprise on the hero's feats. The book epigram outlines the picture of an aggressive and inherently menacing character, one whom even patrons come to fear, as it emerges from the first lines (f. 211v, see fig. 1):

Ὡ τῶν μεγίστων ἐργεπεῖκτα σκαμμάτων, 1
 τὸν πρὶν ἐκεῖνον ζωγραφῶν Εὐρυσθέα,
 κ' ἂν οὐκ ἄμισθι τοὺς ἀγῶνας προτρέπῃς,
 δώροις δὲ συχνοῖς νῦν ἐλαύνεις πρὸς πόνους,
 δέξαι τὸν ἄθλον ἐντελῇ πεφηνότα· 5
 ὁ σὸς γὰρ αὐτὸν Ἡρακλῆς ὡς προὔτράπη,
 δείκνυσι τανῦν ἐμφανῶς ἡνυσμένον.
 Τρέσῃς δὲ μηδὲν, μὴ προπέμψῃς Κοπρέα
 τούτου θεατήν, προστατοῦντα τῶν πόνων.
 Oh you, taskmaster⁹⁵ of the greatest contests,⁹⁶
 making an impression of that famous ancient Eurystheus,
 you give way to the agons, albeit not without compensation.
 No! With innumerable gifts you now exhort to labors.
 Accept the deed that now appears to be done.
 Your Heracles, as he was urged to do,
 shows it (to you): it is now clearly accomplished.
 Do not flee away and do not send forward Kopreus
 to watch it, as a steward of the labors.

These lines find a parallel precisely in the *Iambi* published by Leone, at lines II 233-235,⁹⁷ where Tzetzes says that he suffered much more than Heracles, pointing out once again Eurystheus' malicious disposition.⁹⁸

The lion's skin was of course a staple in Heracles' iconography, traditionally a trophy from the first labor, the killing of the Nemean lion. However, enlarging

as occurrence 19743 (<https://www.dbbe.ugent.be/occurrences/19743>). The entry is based on the catalogue of the Leiden University Library (K.A. DE MEYËR, *Codices Vossiani Graeci et miscellanei*. Leiden 1955, 93), which provides only the *incipit* and the *explicit* of the poem.

95 The term usually occurs in contexts where waged and menial labor is addressed: see for instance EUSTATHIOS, *Opusc.* XIII 17 (G.L.F. TAFEL, *Eustathii Metropolitae Thessalonicensis Opuscula. Accedunt Trapezuntinae Historiae Scriptores Panaretus et Eugenicus: e codicibus Mss. Basileensi, Parisinis, Veneto. Francoforti ad Moenum 1832* [Cambridge 2014], 92, 93).

96 The word is literally connected with digging as shown e.g. by Pl. *Lg.* 845e.

97 Tz., *Iambi* (cited n. 1), 142.

98 Eurystheus appears as a double-edged figure also in EUST., in *Il.* III 379 (cited n. 48), 1-4.

on Heracles in *Historia* II 36, Tzetzes provides a different narrative. The original spin given to the story is prompted by his skepticism at the endemic presence of lions in the plains of Thebes and Nemea. Tzetzes postulates instead that lions were taken from other regions only to be displayed there as extravaganzas. Accordingly, he situates the acquisition of the skin outside the canonical twelve labors:

Ἐτῶν δὲ ὀκτωκαίδεκα νέμων ἐν Κιθαιρῶνι,
βοῶν φθορέα λέοντα κτείνας φορεῖ τὸ δέρμα.⁹⁹

At eighteen, dwelling on the Cithaeron,
after killing a lion destroyer of oxen, he wears its skin.

What matters to our concerns is that the “ethological imagery” is the same as in the *Iambs*, in the Pétridès poem and in the letter to the anonymous bishop: mountain lions that feed on herd animals. Tzetzes-Heracles, therefore, replicates the habits of his animal-spirit, as it were, threatening his buffalo-like colleagues.

The contrast between lone wild creature and herd animals captures once again the antithesis “I”/“them” already mentioned above. “Them”, as we have seen, are conceptualized as a close-knit group, in which mutual legitimation and clan-support are the norm. “They” recognize and acknowledge each other as similar. In what follows we will unpack the language used by Tzetzes to identify and describe the practices of this close-knit group, reading it against the backdrop of Tzetzes’ later production.

Constantinopolitan Tribes

When it comes to his implied addressees – and the implicit target of his hexameters – Tzetzes capitalizes on two key conceptual areas: judgement and inclusion. The former is explicitly evoked through the repeated use of the verb κρίνω, while the latter emerges in the reference to admission/acclamation (κήρυξαν) and participation in collective, assembly-like bodies (συγκλήτου, πολῖται). Both strategies, as we shall see, are not peculiar to these lines alone; on the contrary, they form a thread that can be followed throughout Tzetzes’ oeuvre and that, while showing lexical variations, proves to be semantically consistent over time.

I will first focus on the conceptual nexus related to “admission”. The verb κηρύττω features prominently in the affair with Andronikos Kamateros, alluded to in *Historia* XI 369. Tzetzes’ rant addresses precisely the fact that an unworthy colleague of him had been “proclaimed” rhetor,¹⁰⁰ while he himself is “pro-

⁹⁹ Tz., Hist. II 36 (cited n. 4), 220-222.

¹⁰⁰ Tz., Hist. XI 369 (cited n. 4), 224.

claimed” ignorant of rhetoric by Kamateros.¹⁰¹ At the same time, Tzetzes often complains that in Constantinople thieves and rogues coming from the provinces were proclaimed saints, while barbarian authors were celebrated as skilled, amidst profligate banquets. We have seen above that the verb features prominently also in the letter to Gobinos.¹⁰² *Historia* X 306, 64-67, moreover, is particularly telling in this respect:

Τανῦν δε τρισεξάγιστα τῶν ἀμαθῶν κνωδάλων
βίβλους βαρβάρους γράφοντα καὶ τρισεπιβαρβάρους
ὡς τεχνικοὶ κηρύττονται τοῖς μεθυσκοκτάβοις,
καὶ τεχνικὸν μὴ γράφοντες μηδέν, μηδὲ εἰδότες.

Now the thrice accursed among the ignorant beasts,
who write barbarian – No! Thrice barbarian! – books,
are proclaimed skilled amidst drunken kottabi,
even though they do not write anything skilled, and nothing they know.

Tzetzes uses here the same words he had ascribed earlier to Aristogeiton, allegedly addressed against Demosthenes and Lycurgus:

Ἀριστογείτων οὕτωσὶ τάδε κατ’ ἔπος λέγει·
κνώδαλα τὰ ἐξάγιστα τῶν τρισαλιτηρίων,
ὁ Δημοσθένης, ἅμα τε καὶ ὁ Λυκοῦργος, λέγω.¹⁰³

Aristogeiton says literally as follows:

Evil beasts among the thrice accursed ones,
I mean Demosthenes and Lycurgus with him.

By using the same words as Aristogeiton, in *Historia* X 306, Tzetzes implicitly points once again to the sphere of rhetoric and public debates. Furthermore, the *historia* resonates with the final iambic poem published by Leone after our hexameters, where, once again, the notion of an ill-informed cultural judgement – revolving around “discourses” – takes center-stage.¹⁰⁴ The same emphasis on immoderate consumption of wine and the allusion to profligate banquets through

101 Tz., Hist. XI 369 (cited n. 4), 354.

102 See above n. 60.

103 Tz., Hist. VI 37 (cited n. 4), 96-99. The quotation corresponds to fr. 3 Sauppe (H. SAUPPE, *Demosthenis Orationes selectae*. Gotha 1845, 310). Aristogeiton was an opponent of Demosthenes, Hyperides and Lycurgus. On his life and work see R. SEALEY, *Who Was Aristogeiton?*, *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 7 (1960) 33-43. Interestingly, he is mentioned in Hermogenes's *De ideis* II 9 (Tzetzes enlarges on him in his commentary, *Voss. gr.* Q1 172v and 176v) and described as endowed with a particularly querulous style and prone to insult. One cannot but wonder whether this characterization aroused Tzetzes' sympathies or was felt by the audience as particularly suitable for Tzetzes himself.

104 Tz., Hist. 316-322 and 331-336 (cited n. 4), 145.

the image of the kottabos also points to the environment of the Kamateroi and of the literati around them.¹⁰⁵

Κηρύττω is not the only verb used by Tzetzes to convey the notions of inclusion/recognition. Χειροτονέω also expresses the same meaning. In the passage from the *Historiai* quoted above (XIII 483, 362) provincials with shadowy reputations coming from all over the empire join the capital only to be “elected” saints. Although the term is frequently used to describe appointments or elections, it is perhaps worth noting that it features also in the “edict” enacted by Alexios I in 1107 to reform clergy and, incidentally, also higher education in Constantinople.¹⁰⁶ It refers the procedure through which candidates to teaching positions access to the diaconate, a required step to climb the ladder of appointments within the system of the so-called “Patriarchal school”.¹⁰⁷ Tzetzes himself is aware that the ancient meaning of the term described “democratic” election by the raising of hands and was therefore different from contemporary usages, as shown by *Historia* VIII 232. He also employs it in its technical sense in ep. 29:

Κατὰ τὴν σήμερον, δέσποτα, μέλλει τις τῶν ἐμῶν χειροτονηθῆναι διάκονος καὶ δεῖ καὶ ἐμὴ τῇ τοιαύτῃ συμπαραμαρτεῖν ἑορτῇ, ἐπεὶ καὶ προκέκλημαι παρ’ αὐτοῦ. Ὅμβρῳ δὲ νυκτερίῳ τῶν ἀμφοδῶν τελματωδῶν γενομένων αὐτοποδία βαδίσαι οὐ δύναμαι.¹⁰⁸

Today, my sir, one of ours is going to be appointed deacon and I must accompany him to such a celebration, since I have also been invited by him. The sidewalks being all flooded by tonight’s rain, I cannot go by foot.

105 See PIZZONE, Tzetzes and the *prokatasstasis* (cited n. 7) and the passage at Tz., Ep. 89 (cited n. 20), 129, 13. On the *kottabos*, Tzetzes enlarges in Hist. VI 85 (cited n. 4), 856-860, where he associates to wine a series of terms, including προπηλακισμός for which he creates a pareymology (860); πηλὸν τὸν οἶνον γὰρ φησι καὶ κάπηλον ἐκ τούτου (“for he, *scil.* Tzetzes, says that *pēlos* is the wine and also *kapēlos*, tavern keeper, comes from there”). At 893, Tzetzes also equates the *kottabos* to ὕβρις σύμπασα καὶ πᾶσα φλυαρία, that is to insults and idle words (implicitly caused by excessive consumption of wine).

106 See for the text, P. GAUTIER, L’édit d’Alexis I^{er} Comnène sur la réforme du clergé. *REB* 31 (1973) 165-201; and P. MAGDALINO, The reform edict of 1107, in: M. MULLETT – D. SMYTHE (eds.), Alexios I Komnenos (*Belfast Byzantine texts and translations*, 1). Belfast 1996, 199-218 for an analysis of the text.

107 See GAUTIER, L’édit d’Alexis I^{er} Comnène (cited n. 106), 179, 22-24; 199, 320-321; and cf. *ibidem*, 195, 265. On the Patriarchal school, see now the extraordinary PhD dissertation of I.CH. NESSERIS, Η παιδεία στην Κωνσταντινούπολη κατά τον 12ο αιώνα, PhD thesis, University of Ioannina, I-II. Ioannina 2014.

108 Tz., Ep. 29 (cited n. 20), 44, 18-22. I think it is not coincidental that Tzetzes devotes a whole *historia* (VIII 232) to describe the practice of the *ancient* χειροτονία stressing that in antiquity it was a truly open procedure: vote took place by show of hand and it could happen often that no one was deemed suitable for the appointment.

This text, chronologically either from the late 1130s or from the 1140s, is addressed to a student of his, Alexios, the son of the protovestiaris.¹⁰⁹ The lines quoted above are relevant for a series of reasons. First, τις τῶν ἐμῶν suggests the presence of a group around/including Tzetzes and might allude to a cohort of pupils. Second, the passage shows that at least in the late thirties, early forties, Tzetzes was not surely a deacon himself, as he specifies that he will take part in the ceremony only because explicitly invited by the nominated person. Third, the verb συμπαρομαρτεῖν implies a public procession as a part of procedure of appointment. This detail speaks to the rituals of display often described in twelfth-century sources, such as Choniates' Πρὸς τοὺς αἰτιωμένους τὸ ἀφιλένδεικτον, as analyzed by Bourbouhakis.¹¹⁰ All in all, the letter shows that such "rituals of admission", despite Tzetzes' proclaimed disdain, were important also to his own group, at least in an earlier phase of his career.¹¹¹

The notion of group-allegiance is also expressed by stressing conformity. Besides terms like ὁμοίος or ἴσος,¹¹² we have seen above that "tribal membership" is another recurrent image. More specifically, we would like to demonstrate that Tzetzes uses antiquarian vocabulary related to Athenian tribes and districts to suggest that his opponents are bound by local allegiances – who, as we have seen in the case of the provincial youngster taken to the capital by his fellow country people – could also be based on geographical origin.¹¹³ *Historia* XII 422 illustrates this point unambiguously. The text explains why Tzetzes uses the terms συμμορία and τριττύς in Ep. 89, where he describes a performance during which his verses had been submitted to scrutiny in what looks like a public performance.¹¹⁴ The related *historia* clarifies the different shades of meanings the two archaizing terms come to have:

109 On Alexios and this letter in particular see M. GRÜNBART, Prosopographische Beiträge zum Briefcorpus des Ioannes Tzetzes. *JÖB* 46 (1996) 175-226: 191-194. Tzetzes sends to Alexios nine letters overall, between 1138 and 1147 according to Grünbart.

110 See E. BOURBOUHAKIS, The End of ἐπίδειξις. Authorial Identity and Authorial Intention in Michael Chōniatēs Πρὸς τοὺς αἰτιωμένους τὸ ἀφιλένδεικτον, in: A. PIZZONE (ed.), *The Author in Middle Byzantine Literature. Modes, Functions, and Identities* (*Byzantinisches Archiv*, 28). Boston – Berlin 2014, 201-224.

111 Cf. *contra* Tz., Ep. 57 (cited n. 20), 19, 79, where Tzetzes, writing to Eirene's secretary, complains that treacherous dupe kings and dignitaries, being "elected" as saints despite questionable behaviors.

112 See for example, Tz., Hist. VI 79 (cited n. 4), 796-797.

113 It needs to be stressed that *symmoria* was used to describe a group or gang of students already by Libanius, as shown by R. CRIBIORE, *The School of Libanius in Late Antique Antioch*. Princeton 2007, 93, 122, 200.

114 See AGAPITOS, John Tzetzes and the Blemish Examiners (cited n. 7), n. 84 and ZAGKLAS, *Satire in the Komnenian Period* (cited n. 84), 296-301.

Φυλὴ μέρος τὸ δέκατον τῆς πόλεως ὑπῆρχε,
 πόλεως δὲ τῶν Ἀθηνῶν. Δέκα φυλάς γὰρ εἶχε,
 καὶ ὕστερον γεγόνασιν ἐνδέκα, δεκαδύο.
 Αἰσχίνης γράφει τὴν φυλὴν δέκατον μέρος εἶναι.
 Τριττὺς δ' ἦν τρίτον τῆς φυλῆς. Ἡ δέ γε συμμορία
 ἦν ἀριθμὸς ἐξήκοντα σωμάτων, οὐ πλειόνων,
 ὥς γράφει Δημοσθένης πρὸς συμμοριῶν τῷ λόγῳ·
 ἐκ τούτων δέον εἴκοσι ποιῆσαι συμμορίας,
 ὥς νῦν σώματα ἔχουσιν ἐξήκοντα ἐκάστην.
 Καὶ τὰλλα εὖρης ἀκριβῶς συμμοριῶν τῷ λόγῳ.
 Οὕτω κυρίως ἡ φυλὴ, τριττὺς καὶ συμμορία.
 Τὰ δέ γε συναγωγία, τριττὺς καὶ συμμορίας
 ἡμεῖς τανῦν εἰρήκειμεν καταχρηστικωτέρως.¹¹⁵

A tribe was the tenth fraction of the city,
 namely of the city of Athens. For it had ten tribes,
 even if they later became eleven, twelve.
 Aeschines writes that the tribe is the tenth fraction.
 The trittys was a third of the tribe. The symmoria
 consisted of sixty bodies, not more,
 as Demosthenes writes in his speech on the symmoriai;
 in this basis they had to make twenty symmoriai,
 as now having sixty bodies each.
 And find all the rest thoroughly explained in the speech on the symmoriai.
 This is the proper meaning of tribe, trittys and symmoria.
 However, we had now called the “gatherings” trittys and symmoriai
 as if by a misuse of language.

Tzetzes distinguishes between proper, historical (κυρίως) and his personal use (καταχρηστικωτέρως) of the terms employed in the letter, explaining that they are synonyms with συναγωγή, a term that we have already encountered above in the *historia* X 123. Unfortunately, the meaning of συναγωγή is not very transparent. Besides the obvious etymological meaning of “get-together”, συναγωγή seems to have been used both for social and military gatherings, as explained also by Eustathios in a passage of his commentary on the *Iliad*:

Ἰστέον δὲ ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ Ὀμηρικῶς ὑσμίνην ἢ Ἄρην ἢ πόλεμον συνάγειν εἰληφθαι
 δοκεῖ καὶ τὸ παρὰ τοῖς ὕστερον συναγωγήιον, τό τε ἄλλο καὶ τὸ ἀπὸ συμ-
 βολῶν. Ἐκεῖθεν δὲ εἰληπται καὶ τὰ συναγωγήια παρὰ τῷ Ἀθηναίῳ δεῖπνα

115 Tz., Hist. XII 422 (cited n. 4), 527-539.

καὶ συνάγειν τὸ μετ' ἀλλήλων συμπίνειν, ὥς λόγῳ καὶ σύνδειπνον ἐλέγετο τὸ συμπόσιον. Εἰ δ' οὕτω τοῦτ' ἐστί, καὶ τὸ συνάγειν προσφυῶς ἐπὶ τε μάχης ἐπὶ τε δαιτὸς κοινῆς λέγεται, καλῶς ἄρα οἱ μὴ ἀνθρωπίνως ἀλλὰ κατὰ θηρία δαινύμενοι ἐν τῷ στασιάζειν καὶ διὰ τοῦτο μηδέν τι δαιτὸς ἐσθλῆς ἥδος ἔχοντες δοκοῦσι λέγειν καὶ αὐτοὶ τὸ “δεῦτε, ξυνάγωμεν Ἄρηα” καὶ ὁ τῶν τοιούτων οἶκος κατὰ τὸν ἀστεῖον Δειπνοσοφιστὴν “ὁμοῦ μὲν θυμιαμάτων γέμει, ὁμοῦ δὲ παιάνων τε καὶ στεναγμάτων”, τὸ Σοφόκλειον.¹¹⁶

It is to be known that from the Homeric expression “to gather strife or Ares or war” the later term “gathering” seems to have been conceived of (meaning) gatherings of all sorts, including those where everyone brings their share. From there also “gatherings” in Athenaeus (to be understood as) banquets have been conceived and “to gather” as “to drink together”: according to this rationale the common meal was called symposium. If this is the case, and “to gather” is naturally said both as regards battles and common meals, then those who dine amidst strife, not like humans but like animals (and therefore “do not have any joy in the excellent feast”) seem fittingly to say “Here, let’s gather Ares” and the house of such people, according to the urban Deipnosophist “is full of both offerings and paeans as well as shouting”, following Sophocles’ quote.¹¹⁷

Συναγωγίον, therefore, suggests the idea of a shared meal washed down with abundant wine. Accordingly, the term συμμορία as used by Tzetzes, hints both at groups of power or interests, and at their shared, questionable social practices. That συμμορία points to a specific reality in Constantinople’s geography of power is confirmed by *Historia* X 223, quoted above, where we find false philosophers harvesting successes among the “symmorai”.¹¹⁸ The description reminds the reader of letter 14, addressed to Constantine, chartophylax of the Great Church. Here Tzetzes denounces a monk who, by holding questionable gathering in his κελλίον – although theoretically a recluse –, was leading astray members of the clergy of the Church of the Holy Apostles. Although he had been warned and church officers were sent to him to put a halt to his problematic behavior, he had persisted in his dealings, moving to another κελλίον. What was going on there is described by Tzetzes as follows:

Ἀποστολῖται δὲ ὀλίγοι τινὲς ταῖς μὲν ἀξίαις τοῦ ἱεροῦ καταλόγου τυγχάνοντες (ὡς τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ ἀνοχῆς), τοῖς ἔργοις δὲ μεθυσκοῦντα καὶ οἰνόφυλγες

116 EUST., in Il. III 927 (cited n. 48), 15 ff.

117 HOM. Il. 2.381; SOPH. OT 4-5; ATHEN. X 17, 14-15.

118 Tz., Hist. X 223 (cited n. 4), 268-271.

ἄνθρωποι ποτηρίῳ οἴνου καὶ τὴν εὐσέβειαν ἀρνησόμενοι, καὶ ἕτεροι χυδαῖοί
τινες καὶ Κρητικοί τινες αὐτοῦ συγγενεῖς, τῇ σῇ δικαίᾳ κρίσει μὴ ἀρεσκόμενοι
[...] τὸν παλαμναῖον ἐκεῖνον γεραίρουσι πανταχοῦ καὶ ἀνακηρύττουσιν.¹¹⁹

Few members of the Holy Apostles, formally belonging to clergy in terms (oh God's endurance), but *de facto* spending their time amidst drunken kottaboi and intoxication due to wine, not complying with your piety, and some other vile people, and some Cretans, relatives of that person, who do not obey to your just judgement [...] honor and celebrate in every way that abominable man.

As a consequence, Tzetzes asks the chartophylax to shut down all the ἐγκλεῖσται once for all, as they have become ἀνθρωποχοιροτρόφια καὶ συμποσίων καὶ μοιχείας καταγωγαὶ ἥπερ ἐπαύλεις καὶ μάνδραι ψυχοσωτήριοι ("dwelling of pig-like men and places inducing to symposia and fornication, rather than quarters and dens for the soul's salvation").¹²⁰

The Holy Apostles, as we learn from Mesarites,¹²¹ was famously the site of a school in the capital and it is certainly enlightening to see here these allegations addressed against his clergy. Once again, Tzetzes blames an outsider (a Cretan) for the moral and cultural degeneration of the Capital. The letter is dated to 1139 by Grünbart.¹²² However, there might be grounds to rethink this dating. As stated by Grünbart himself, Tzetzes' addressee is known also from contemporary documents, seals, and, above all, from a synodal act from the Patriarchate of Michael Kourkouas, dated to the 19th of November 1145.¹²³ What is remarkable is that many of the names mentioned in the document overlap with several addressees of Tzetzes. Michael Kourkouas himself belonged among Tzetzes' correspondants,¹²⁴ but we find also John Smeniotes¹²⁵ and Alexios, the nephew of the Protovestiaris, who, as we have seen, was the correspondent addressed more often by

119 Tz., Ep. 14 (cited n. 20), 26, 4-12.

120 Tz., Ep. 14 (cited n. 20), 27, 11-13.

121 See G. DOWNEY (ed. and transl.), Nikolaos Mesarites, Description of the Church of the Holy Apostles at Constantinople. *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 47.6 (1957) 859-918, ch. 7-11. The description was addressed to the Patriarch John X Kama-teros.

122 GRÜNBART, Prosopographische Beiträge (cited n. 109), 185.

123 E. PAPAGIANNI – S. TROIANOS, Die Besetzung der Ämter im Großskeuophylakeion. Ein Synodalakt vom 19. November 1145. *Fontes Minores* 6 (1984) 87-98.

124 Tz., Ep. 30 (cited n. 20).

125 PAPAGIANNI – TROIANOS, Die Besetzung (cited n. 123), 88, 25; 89, 60; and Tz., Ep. 47 (cited n. 20). On this letter see A. PRIZZONE, Bureaucratic Discourse, Signature and Authorship in John Tzetzes: A Comparative Perspective. *Acme* 73.1 (2020) 43-67, with previous bibliography.

Tzetzes.¹²⁶ Mention is made also of one Leo, son of Nikolaos Styppes, probably a relative of the previous Patriarch Leo Styppes, with whom Tzetzes had also had some dealings.¹²⁷ The strong presence of this network of people belonging to the circle of Michael Kourkouas, as well as the fact that Tzetzes poses as advisor in administrative matters of no secondary importance – the shutting down of all the enclosures of the capital – might suggest that letter 14 has also to be dated to the time of the patriarchate of Michael Kourkouas.

The final lines of our hexametric poem seem to concentrate motifs and issues that have marked Tzetzes' intellectual trajectory since the early 1140s at least. What changes, apparently, is his position toward the centers of power, especially in connection with the network of Constantinopolitan schools. The letters from the early 1140s parade an author apparently closer to the higher ecclesiastical hierarchies, while the letters from the later period tend to emphasize ongoing conflicts with certain groups of interest. The hexametric lines closing the *Historiai* capture the same bitterness and convey a broader picture of intellectual decadence, due to the – alleged – decline of important assembly bodies such as the senate, mentioned in the poem's last line.

In the letter collection too Tzetzes stages his support for the senate as embodiment of a more distributed power. In 1146, for instance, he writes to Manuel Komnenos reminding him the role of the senate and of the synod in electing the Patriarch and urges him not to listen to those asking for his removal.¹²⁸ His plea was written in favor of the patriarch Kosmas later demoted in 1147 following to allegations of Bogomilism. Tzetzes himself, however, demonstrates a wavering attitude toward the Bogomils active in Constantinople, as shown by Grünbart.¹²⁹ This demonstrates that group allegiances could easily change in the capital and is yet another reason to take Tzetzes' carefully staged squabbles with an abundant pinch of salt.

To sum up, the hexametric book epigram closing the second recension of the *Historiai*, provides first-hand rhetorical and contextual instructions to read Tzetzes' self-commentary. It points to its main object, that is rhetoric, testifying

126 PAPAGIANNI – TROIANOS, Die Besetzung (cited n. 123), 89, 59; Tz., Epp. 24-27, 29, 31, 34, 36, 40 (cited n. 20).

127 See Tz., Hist. IX 299 (cited n. 4), 960-964; and see AGAPITOS, Tzetzes and the Blemish Examiner (cited n. 7), 33-35.

128 Tz., Ep. 46 (cited n. 20). See M. GRÜNBART, Aspekte der politischen Verflechtung des Patriarchen in der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit. ZRVI 50.1 (2013) 283-300.

129 M. GRÜNBART, Tzurichos, ein Häretiker aus der ersten Hälfte des 12. Jhs. (Io. Tzetzes, ep. 55). BSl 55 (1994) 15-18 and Id., 'Tis love that has warm'd us'. Reconstructing Networks in 12th Century Byzantium. Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire 83.2 (2005) 301-313: 307-308.

to the importance of the polemic against the Kamateroi for the whole work. The Kamateroi, however, were not alone. With them came a network – as per Tzetzes' description – of outsiders turned insiders after settling in the capital, with a centripetal movement detrimental to the cultural scene. Finally, the hexameters clarify the work's communicative intention, its jesting nature, which, on one hand serves the purpose of toning down the harshness of Tzetzes' polemic while, on the other, still showcases his rhetorical prowess.

More needs to be done in this respect to map out in a granular way the movements of groups of interests (and their geographical origin) in the decades between the 1130s and the 1160s. The *Historiai*'s book epigram however already provides us with an important key to open up the work's complex rhetorical build, alerting us on how to read the signs left by Tzetzes' paw.

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ABSTRACT

This paper offers the first literary-historical analysis of the book epigram in hexameters sealing the second recension of John Tzetzes' *Historiai*. The book epigram belongs to a corpus of paratexts that, despite being edited by Pietro Luigi Leone half a century ago, have received very little attention. Yet, as we argue, they are crucial to understand how Tzetzes positioned the *Historiai* within his oeuvre, offering at the same time striking insights into the intellectual scene of 12th-century Constantinople. The hexametric book epigram, in particular, provides a key to read through the generic and rhetorical conventions of the *Historiai*, allowing the readers to “crack” their code and stressing the importance of humor and irony to read through Tzetzes' own idiosyncratic expressive modules.

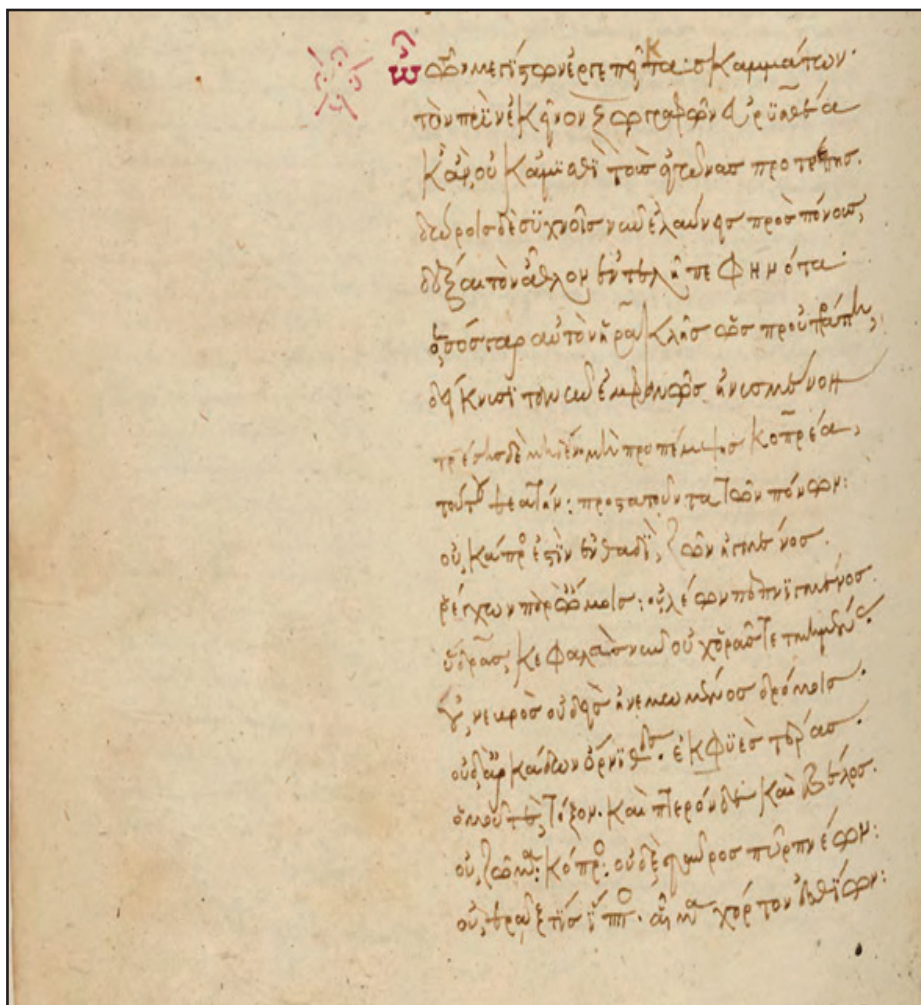


Fig. 1 - Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, Voss. gr. Q1, f. 211v, detail